

# **SMALL FARM TRAINING GROUP**

## **August 2021 Newsletter**

This month's newsletter includes:

- 1000 years of traditional farming - Part 2
- Update from the South of England Show
  - Sow Grow and Cook - Carrots
  - The Bees Knees



August 2021



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## Letter from the Chair

By Zoe Chinman

It's been a positive few weeks here at the SFTG HQ - it looks like the country is slowly getting back to a pre-covid normal, workshops can resume, gatherings are back on, and social events can start to fill up in our autumn calendars. With this in mind, be sure to check out our events for August and September and get booking if there is something you like the look of - they sell out quickly.

If you prefer to stay home and watch a bit of TV, I thoroughly recommend a flick through Jeremy Clarkson's Farm - he raises the issues faced by British Farmers in 8 entertaining episodes filmed during lockdown. Sometimes funny, sometimes sad, it certainly has opened my eyes to certain aspects of farming that I had never even considered - well worth a watch if you have access to Amazon.

Talking of TV, some of our members have been helping a TV production team who are working on a program for BBC Two, promoting smallholding through the eyes of a celebrity chef who has bought a smallholding locally in East Sussex. Filming is due to start mid-August and we hope that this will generate exposure for the SFTG in general, as well as promote and encourage others to take the leap and build up their own mini farm. Watch this space for updates....

## What events are coming up..

Please note all courses are run in accordance with government guidance

### AUGUST

14<sup>th</sup> August – Peg Loom Weaving

15<sup>th</sup> August – Introduction to Keeping Pigs Workshop

22<sup>nd</sup> August - Introduction to Keeping Pigs Workshop

27<sup>th</sup> August - Small Farmers Picnic and Scavenger Hunt

### SEPTEMBER

4<sup>th</sup> September - Hedgerow and Fruit Wines Workshop

4<sup>th</sup> September - Coffee roasting and appreciation

In the meantime, I hope you all get out and enjoy the last of the summer sun, it will be over all too quickly I'm sure - and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible on workshops and at the AGM, Friday Night Meetings, Harvest Picnic & Social Night on November 19th.

Zoe x



**Figure 1: February's illustration from the Julius Work Calendar (1000-1050 AD)**

## 1000 years of traditional farming

### Part 2 - Cutting firewood and hedge laying

By Paul Lovatt-Smith

February. The word derives from the Roman meaning month of fevers. My old next-door neighbor, Brian, said it was called "February Fill-dyke" in Essex, where he came from, because of the amount of rainfall. Not a month for working the land or doing anything involving mud, such as travelling on Saxon roads in England. In the Eleventh Century it would have been a month were staying at home and keeping warm by the fireside was at the forefront of people's minds.

The February illustration has been interpreted as "pruning vines" by the British Library. I respectfully disagree. Granted, the plants look somewhat like vines, but I think this is the artist's personal style of depicting trees and bushes. There are similar-looking plants in the July and October illustrations which clearly illustrate timber-cutting and pig-keeping in a forest respectively. Although there may have been vine-growing at that time in southern England (the Julius calendar was made in the Medieval Warm Period of the North Atlantic climate, which lasted from 950 to 1250 AD), wine would surely have been a rare niche product for the rich and very few people would have been involved in growing it. Whereas nearly everyone would have been involved in getting hold of the basic commodity for life and warmth: firewood.

7<sup>th</sup> September - Honey Extraction

12<sup>th</sup> September - Harvest Picnic

16<sup>th</sup> September - Selecting the Right Breed of Sheep at the Dolphin Sheep Fair

16<sup>th</sup> September - SFTG Social Cuppa at the Dolphin Sheep Fair

17<sup>th</sup> September - SFTG Friday Night Meeting with a talk from Paul Lovatt-Smith on how to grow your own bread

18<sup>th</sup> September - Meet the member - Lee Maitland

26<sup>th</sup> September - Dehydrating for Beginners

### OCTOBER

9<sup>th</sup> October - Autumn Cider Making Workshop

23<sup>rd</sup> October - Introduction to Smallholding

30<sup>th</sup> October - Small Farmers Autumn Antics

### NOVEMBER

7<sup>th</sup> November - Macrame Morning Workshop

7<sup>th</sup> November - Candle Making Workshop

13<sup>th</sup> November - Bacon curing and sausage making

19<sup>th</sup> November - AGM and Social Night

### DECEMBER

18<sup>th</sup> December - Small Farmers Family Christmas Craft Morning

If there is a course you would like to do but haven't seen listed, please don't hesitate to let us know.

So, I would say that the picture shows three men at work cutting firewood. Note that they are not felling the trees but pollarding, or in the case of hedge-laying, pleaching (more on this later). The product would have been small diameter roundwood and brushwood. The brushwood would have been tied into faggots, the poor man's fuel, and also, I am told, used in bread-making as they burn hot and quick. Today we are more wasteful with brushwood, making bonfires of it. But bonfires are nice to keep warm by on a cold February day.

The men all use that most marvelous of hand-tools: the billhook. This survives today in exactly the same form. The photo below is of a vintage Yorkshire billhook, which I bought at Bentley Woodfair a few years ago for £75 and is one of my most treasured and useful tools. It has two cutting edges, one flat for heavy-handed work, like an axe, and the other curved in a hook shape for pull-cutting, stripping brushwood off branches and light cutting at an angle. The sharpening stone, called a cigar-stone for obvious reasons, is quite coarse as the blades tend to get blunt quite quickly. The bevel is on both sides of the blade so both sides are sharpened evenly. The tool can be used with one or two hands and is nicely balanced. It is an inanimate friend and I would not sell it, not even for £500.



**Figure 1: Yorkshire billhook and sharpening stone**

There is an old saying that you get warm three times with wood: felling it, logging it and burning it. We have a fantastic wood-burning cooker made by the British firm Esse which is in use daily from November to April. This not only cooks but heats the house to the extent that the central heating is rarely on when the stove is going. We also have a small wood-burning stove in the living room. We get through around 3 tonnes of wood

per year so we have somewhat of an 11th Century outlook on firewood. We do not burn brushwood indoors but anything with a diameter of an inch or more gets put on the woodpile or in the woodstore for seasoning (a very important part of wood-burning as I am sure you know). The radiative warmth of the Esse cooker on a dark, cold winter's night is a delight and seems to engender conversation and conviviality, although I am sure that without the distraction of radio, TV and internet and because entertainment had to be self-generated, 11th Century firesides had the edge on us.

## Get Social

Don't forget that we're also on Facebook and Instagram...why not follow us and see what we're up to!

### Insta:

@small\_farm\_training\_group

### Facebook:

Small Farm Training Group



Why not let us follow you and your Facebook/Insta accounts and we can help you with your smallholding dreams and promote your goods to SFTG followers?



## Jobs for the month

By Caroline Upton

August is the time to start considering the winter crop.

Sowing/planting Chard now can provide you a tasty crop in autumn and into winter.

Cabbages are a stalwart of most veg growers but don't forget to protect them from birds who like nothing more than a nibble! Spring cabbage is best sown outdoors in mid-August or late August in modules. You'll be harvesting March/April time.



**Figure 2: Esse woodburning cooker**

Finally, a word or two about hedge-laying. Although the illustration does not directly depict this activity, I am sure it would have been one of the tasks going on at this time. Hedge-laying creates a living livestock barrier and would almost certainly have been a winter task as it would not have been practical to enclose livestock over long distances with wattle panels, post and rail fences or hurdles. A clue that hedging was going on in those days comes from the

hedging term to "pleach", which is from the Old French "plecher" which means to plait or interlace, which in turn derives from the Latin "plectere", to braid. Pleaching is the key to hedge-laying and involves laying down carefully-selected and nearly cut-through stems of upright hedge trees in an interwoven way. This is followed by strengthening of the structure with 5 ft 6" sharpened stakes placed in the middle of the hedge and bound by 12ft long hazel or willow binders. The end product is a sturdy 4ft x 4ft living barrier. A well-laid and maintained hedge can last for over 20 years before it needs re-laying.



**Figure 4: Hedge laying, February 2016. Note the pile of brushwood (firewood already removed).**

Hardy Chicory can also be sown now and harvested into winter.

Spinach isn't as tender as it looks and will survive frosts and the rain. Sow in August in alternate weeks and you can harvest from November and March.

Rocket - there are several types of rocket available. The usual salad variety and then you have the slightly more peppery wild rocket. Sown now, wild rocket will make a tasty autumn salad and then it will lie dormant over winter but bounce back the following year. Salad rocket fares better against the frost but it best sown in late August as winters better and is likely to give you a later crop then it's wild relative



## **Best Banana Bread recipe (probably)**

By Caroline Upton

Who doesn't love banana bread! Potentially this might be someone who hates bananas but I'll ignore that obvious answer to the question and share with you a delicious banana bread recipe from the talented Donna Hay. As always, give it a go and if you think you have a better recipe, email it

to me [editor@sftg.org.uk](mailto:editor@sftg.org.uk)  
and I'll publish it.

## Banana, hazelnut and chocolate bread

### Ingredients

125g butter, softened  
1 cup (175g) brown sugar  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
2 eggs  
2 cups mashed banana  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (70g) toasted hazelnuts, chopped  
1 cup (90g) chopped dark chocolate  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cups (255g) plain (all-purpose) flour, sifted  
1 teaspoon baking powder, sifted  
1 teaspoon bicarbonate of (baking) soda  
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon  
 $\frac{1}{3}$  cup (115g) golden syrup

### Method

1. Preheat oven to 160°C (325°F). Place the butter, sugar and vanilla in an electric mixer and beat for 8-10 minutes or until pale and creamy. Scrape down the sides of the bowl.
2. Gradually add the eggs and beat well to combine. Add the banana, hazelnuts, chocolate, flour, baking powder, bicarbonate of soda, cinnamon and golden syrup and stir to combine.
3. Spoon the mixture into a 26cm x 11cm (2.5 litre-capacity) lightly greased loaf tin lined with baking paper. Bake for 70-75 minutes or until cooked when tested with a skewer.



**Figure 5: The same hedge in July 2021, having been annually trimmed at 4ft height. Continuous browsing on this side.**

The billhook is a key tool in hedge laying, along with thick leather gloves. A billhook gives you the best chance of cutting the right distance through the pleacher. Too much of a cut and it will snap, too little and it will split upwards. The billhook is also great for lopping off unwanted branches and cutting brambles. In pre-mechanical times a hedging axe would also have been needed for thicker stems but nowadays it is usually replaced by a small chain saw, for which battery-power is ideal. There is a marvelous short film of hand-tool hedging made by the Ministry of Information in the depths of the Second World War, when lack of steel meant that farmers were being encouraged to lay hedges.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WoprVhpOKIk>. I have watched it over 20 times and am still learning from it. Mr Deighton, the unassuming and well-dressed hedger, is one of my favourite movie stars.

Finally let me sing the praise of hedges and their place in traditional farming: We have around 250 yards of laid hedge around the boundary of our farm, much of which we planted over 15 years ago. We have done away with all the galvanized fencing which was originally there and none of our livestock has escaped - yet. The hedges are a haven for wildlife and provide beneficial browsing for the sheep and cattle. Unlike fences they are free to maintain, in terms of materials. They are the traditional way of doing agroforestry which has come into fashion at the moment. Hedge laying is creative, aerobic and a joy to do on a winter's day. We have London friends who are addicted and come to help each year for their fix. Lastly, hedge-laying provides plenty of that commodity which is depicted in the February Julius calendar illustration: firewood.

Pruning vines? I don't think so.

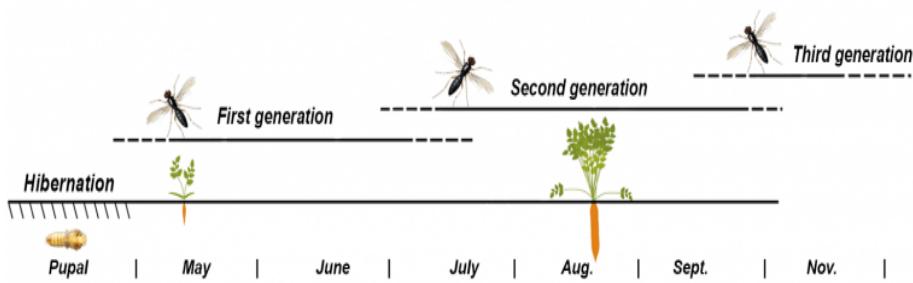
Next time: ditching, cultivating, sowing.



## Sow, Grow and Cook

By Jenny Huggett

Carrots can suffer badly from carrot root fly which is why much of this article is about this enemy of the carrot gardener. The carrot fly has two to three generations per year. The first flight is in May to June and in my experience produces the most damage, the second flight is from the end of July until the beginning of September. The third flight takes place from September to November. The flies lay their eggs in the soil around the developing carrots; the larvae, once hatched, burrow into the root, discolour it and give it a bitter flavour, after several stages of development, the adult flies emerge.



As female carrot flies are very low flying, the best method of prevention is to erect a barrier around the crop at least 2 feet (60 cm) high. Alternatively, horticultural fleece may be used as a floating mulch to cover the crop, but it must be embedded in the soil. Because the carrot fly is attracted to host plants by odour, masking the smell of the host plant by planting odiferous companion crops such as onions, chives, and garlic is said to deter attack, but it has never worked well for me. If you are only growing a few carrots, a large, deep flowerpot on a stand will give lovely results. Growing in a greenhouse or polytunnel also gives the carrots a good chance of evading the flies and has the advantage that you can grow an early variety such as "Amsterdam Forcing" or "Nantes", sowing the seeds

4. Cool in the tin for 20 minutes before turning out onto a wire rack to cool completely. Slice to serve. Serves 6-8.



## News from the Hen Coop

By Jenny Huggett

Despite having an Eglu hen coop I, or rather my hens, have been troubled with red spider mite. I have adapted Richard Moore's mite trap idea, and permanently have strips of double-sided Sellotape along the underside of the removable roosting frame. This catches a lot of the mites but not enough to eradicate them. Then the Doyens of hen keeping, Richard and Edwina Moore mentioned neem oil to me, a natural insecticide from the neem tree, that does no harm to hens. I gave the coop a thorough clean and smeared the oil onto every part of the coop where two surfaces meet and mites can lurk. Two days later my Sellotape mite count is zero! That doesn't mean there are no mites in the coop of course, but now I have the problem well and truly under control I intend

in early March (though germination may be poor). I choose to sow carrots in July, after, what seems to be the most intense period of attack in May/June. For late summer, try any fast-growing variety (such as "Nantes", or Autumn King, but don't make the mistake of leaving them in the soil into the autumn as the third fly generation will find them! There are some varieties such as Flyaway and Resistafly that have some root fly resistance, but not enough to be worth the extra money for the F1 seeds. My final tip for avoiding fly attack is to sow the seeds thinly so that you don't have a lot of thinning to do; thinning attracts the root flies like nothing else.

Carrots are of course a very versatile vegetable, and can be used in soups, salads, stews, cakes; the list is long. I thought I would share a nice soup recipe from Bill Sewell's "Food from the place below". This has the unusual addition of tarragon, and if anyone wants a really good tarragon variety, I have one I am happy to share.

## Carrot and Tarragon Soup



SERVES 6

50 g (2 oz) butter  
50 ml (2 fl oz) sunflower oil  
900 g (2 lbs) carrots, thinly sliced  
1 large onion, roughly chopped  
2 sticks of celery, finely sliced (or you'll get stringy bits)  
2 tsp plain flour  
2 tsp dried tarragon  
1.2 litres (2 pints) water  
Juice of 1 orange  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
120 ml (4 fl oz) single cream

- 1) Melt the butter and mix in the oil. Add the carrots, onion and celery and cook for at least 20 minutes, until extremely soft, to bring out the flavour.
- 2) Add the flour and tarragon and cook very slightly.
- 3) Add the water, stirring, bring to the boil and simmer for about 20 minutes.
- 4) Add the orange juice and blend. Season with salt and pepper. Add the cream, check the seasoning and reheat if necessary, being careful not to boil the soup, then serve.

keeping it that way with the use of neem oil after deep cleans of the coop. I bought my oil online for about £10 for 100 ml, which will last me a long time.



## Letter from the Editor

By Caroline Upton

It's a bit of a bumper edition courtesy of the courses and shows which are gradually starting up (above is a piccie of Paul at the SoE show) and with the regular articles from our very own committee members - Jenny and Paul - along with some new writers. As this is a newsletter for the people it makes perfect sense that it's written BY the people so please do keep your articles coming. It's great to share!

Please send your articles to  
[editor@sftg.org.uk](mailto:editor@sftg.org.uk)



## South of England Show

By Karen Nicholls

The day arrived and the weather was glorious. Nevertheless, we (Alex and I) approached the show with some nervousness. With all the issues around coronavirus would it be well attended? We needn't have worried. Right from early doors, people came flocking in (pardon the pun), and a lovely day was had by all - exhibitors and visitors alike. So what was it about my stint on the Small Farm Training Group stand that stood out for me?

Firstly, the Small Farm Training Group stall was perfectly placed. Located on the avenue opposite an exhibition ring, it provided an inviting, informative and shady space for passers-by. Our display of live chickens, including some very pretty Silkies and a life size model of a sheep, provided an up close non-threatening experience and photo opportunity for many inquisitive children and their families. Our engagement with the public was easy and organic and the time flew by.

# The Bees Knees.....

By Ben and Maggi Pratt

It was so lovely to attend the SFTG picnic on 4th July, thank you Jenny and Cliff for hosting it. It was great to see many new members as well as some regulars, also to do something akin to normal, it certainly gave us hope of things beginning to return to normality. With that in mind and thinking of the forthcoming courses, we thought it would be an opportunity to introduce ourselves.

We are Ben and Maggi Pratt and have been members for more years than we care to remember; we run the beekeeping courses, both the Introduction to Beekeeping, in the Spring, and the extracting course, this year on 7th September, this to be held at our home, in Hailsham.

We have been keeping bees for over 35 years; we started almost by accident as we bought a hive from a friend which we kept in the garden and he helped us novices; then we purchased a second one and a bit like Topsy it grew, and we now keep all our hives on out apiaries on local farms.

After about 6 years Maggi received a call to deal with a swarm of bees; which she did: there followed a series of calls during the swarming season. Sometimes she would be asked if we gave talks about bees, so with a little advice from the local friendly bee inspector we began to give talks to various groups like the W.I., flower clubs, gardeners, schools and SFTG adapting the talk to be suitable for the audience. We would take along some honey to sell and gradually added a range of honey and wax products also. Along the way we met people who were running charity events and would trade at those, this was all before Farmers Markets were heard of.

When Hailsham proposed to hold its inaugural Farmers Market one December in the late 1990's, we had a stall and have been trading there ever since as well as at other markets along the way.

When the local equipment supplier sold his business we bought it, once again starting small, have built it up and carry a range of beekeeping equipment including hive parts, clothing and honey jars.

When working with bees you feel very much that you are working with nature. Bees are wild animals, that we cannot control, but we can work with them by providing a hive in which we put frames, that mimic the combs, which they use for the queen to lay her eggs, in the brood box, and the workers to store the honey in the super. We can make sure the hive is in the best position to catch the early morning sun, for us to inspect it and to make cropping easier.

Without opening the hive, by just observing the bees going in and out, a beekeeper can tell a lot about the health of the colony; is the queen laying, are they being robbed etc. Once the hive is open, the beekeeper is looking in the brood box to see how well the queen is laying, has she got plenty of room, is there enough food, are there any queen cells, a sign the bees are going to replace the old queen or are they about to swarm.

We harvest the honey up to twice a year; in the spring, if the weather has been suitable, and the main crop in the summer. After that, anything the bees gather they keep for food for the winter. We only remove surplus honey; bees don't know when to stop gathering honey and if left to their own devices would have far too much and run out of space to store it. We had this experience once with a hive that had been abandoned!

When you consider how small a honeybee is you may think it is just pollinating the flowers, but they have a very structured, well ordered life, and play a vital role in our food production. It is estimated that bees bring into the national economy £691 million! (2019) Quite a substantial amount when you consider she only lives approximately 6 weeks in the summer.



If anyone wants to get in contact with Maggi and Ben and check out their bee keeping wares, please either call them on **01323 841249** or checkout their website - [www.thebee-people.co.uk](http://www.thebee-people.co.uk)

Secondly, it was the variety of questions asked. I fielded questions from folk wanting to know about keeping pigs and chickens. One family were keen to learn about goats and how to make cheese. Another gentleman was about to start his own apple orchard, and a young couple sought information on market gardening and bee keeping. Then there were the conversations with other smallholders who visited just to chat and share their adventures.

Finally, it was the realisation that as a smallholder, over time through practice and experience, I have acquired knowledge that I could share. As with all smallholders I clearly don't work at the scale or in the manner of commercial farms, but I know enough to help interested like-minded folk and hopefully give them the courage to take the plunge and get started.

What would be my advice to any potential smallholder who approached SFTG?

Seize the day, start small and have fun!



## Dolphin Sheep Fair

By Jenny Cloke



## Small Small Farmers

By Debbie Gordon

Huge thanks to small farmer Jack Rance who took us on a guided tour of his family farm in June. We met Oreo and Bailey the donkeys, the ponies, piglets and sheep. The children enjoyed collecting the eggs and sharing their knowledge and experience of poultry keeping.

We were all captivated by the super cute pygmy goat kids and their antics, which were much more entertaining than most things on the telly! We learnt so much about how to care for the animals and stay safe around them.

Thanks to Jack and his mum Ruth at Hale Farm for a wonderful afternoon.

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## Help Wanted...

By Jenny Cloke

The committee have been organising various workshops and events, but we would like some more help! You may have noticed there is a glut of sheep courses but a dearth of anything on goats, cattle, hedge laying, wildflower meadows..... Could you help fill in some of the blanks? You would not get paid for helping out (as none of the committee get paid). You might volunteer yourself as a tutor or know of someone who could run a workshop for us. We reimburse expenses for tutors and Meet The Members and often pay our tutors a small fee. Perhaps you would like to organise a visit somewhere (possibly even a coach trip). Or you might like to help with background organisational skills like writing the text advertising our courses on the website, or one of a myriad things you think we should do better.

The Dolphin Fair takes its name from a fair held between Cuckfield and Haywards Heath. The fair was set in front of a pub called the Sergison Arms but often known as The Dolphin Inn as three dolphins were part of the Sergison's family crest. It is now a Miller and Carter Steakhouse (photo above). Fairs and markets were held outside the Dolphin from medieval times, but when the railway came to Haywards Heath livestock auctions moved to the centre of the town because it was easier to transport livestock by train and the Dolphin Fair ceased in 1871.

The name Dolphin Fair was revived in the 1950's in Haywards Heath but this was for carnivals and competitions, not trading of livestock. However, the auctioneers Thomas Bannister & Co held a Dolphin Fair at Haywards Heath Market in 1978 and then in the 1980's it moved to the South of England Showground at Ardingly. It is now the biggest sheep fair in the south-east with 6000-7000 breeding sheep and is at the South of England Showground.

This year the Dolphin Sheep Fair will be held on Thursday 16th September.

It is a great place to buy and sell shearlings, ewes, rams and lambs. Shearling ewes are animals that have been shorn once and will be put to the ram for the first time

Please talk to **Jenny Cloke (01435 813252)** or **Zoe Chinman (07540 633625)** about how you would like to help us. Many thanks.

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## How to give injections to animals..

By Caroline Upton

A big thanks to Jenny Cloke for the use of her sheep for this course and for Kate Parrish from Fairfield House Vets, Uckfield for giving us her time and for baking the delicious brownies!

The course started with a talk from Kate about the correct injection sites for sheep, goats and pigs, the importance of recording of the use of medicines on animals, the difference between subcutaneous, intramuscular, and intravenous injections and the importance of why you need to inject as per the data sheet that you get with the medicine or its considered off-licence (as well as it not being absorbed correctly by the animal that its supposed to be helping!). And then the practice started! Using Jenny's very amenable and forgiving sheep.

It was a really interesting session and I definitely feel more comfortable about injecting the pigs we have in our care!

this autumn. It's an enjoyable day out watching the bidding as animals pass through the auction ring. Join the SFTG for a 'A social cuppa' or learn about the different breeds of sheep in our workshop 'Selecting the Right Breed of Sheep'. More details on our website.

## Welcome....

We'd like to give a warm and hearty welcome to the following people who have joined the SFTG in the last few months.

We are very much looking forward to learning more about you and what you are doing over the coming months. Our new members are:

Sinead Fenton, James Carr and April Turville, Celia Emmott  
Susan Thompson & Ron Welsh, Trevor Carpenter & Kai Bowers  
Paul Booth, Michael Lavelle, Christopher Filkins, Barnaby James  
Clare Teague-Smith, Steven Gladwin, Zoe Green, David McGibney, Jenny Phillips, Hannah Cooper, Cassie, Barry, Arlo, Roman & Jessica Yate-Lee, Paul, Sarah, Isabella, Lawrence & Georgina Graham  
Peter and Theresa Catt & Stephanie Baldwin, Steve Beale  
Jenny Rawlings, Paul & Shirah Mustardé, Rhiannan McDermott, Ed & Claire Sayer, Teena Field, Charlotte Wales, William Eastham

