

Sun Rising News

The twice yearly newsletter of
Sun Rising Natural Burial Ground and Nature Reserve

Winter 2008/9



Welcome to our third winter newsletter.

The Roundhouse

We are very pleased to announce the completion of brand new weather screens designed and made for our memorial Roundhouse by local craftsman, Mark Ellis. Made of green oak and willow, these cleverly protect gatherings from wind and rain, while still allowing sunlight to filter through into the building. It's a lovely effect.

The screens can cover any four of the eight sides of the building, and are available for funerals and memorial services. If you would like to have use of them for a family gathering at Sun Rising, please let us know.



With regard to our green roof, we are still watching to see what happens! Sedum, mosses and other plants are doing well on the northern side, but on the southern side there are still bare areas, where (we think) a sparrowhawk keeps pulling at the matting. Instead of replacing the sedum, however, we are still willing to see what thrives on its own strength; these will be the hardiest plants in the long run.

Meanwhile, the roses are creeping up the beams. Next summer they will have sufficiently settled to grow beautifully. The ivies we planted, which were nibbled badly, are still small, but we are continuing to watch and see how they progress.

Wildflowers and Grasses

Last September, an area of agricultural rye grass to either side of the main track to the Roundhouse was sprayed out, and the earth harrowed. Over the course of the following weeks, we sowed our special mix of wildflowers and grasses; scattering the seeds over such an area was a wonderful experience, with a real sense of history.

Until the areas fully germinate and green by mid spring, they will continue to look a little bare. If all goes well, they will be an important first step in establishing our wildflower meadows.

Bulb Planting

Another 600 or so bulbs were planted at Sun Rising in October, many of these by families creating patches and swathes of colour near their loved one's graves.

Though the first early snowdrops may be pushing through the frost in our gardens, we have to be patient at Sun Rising where the native bulbs come through a little later. Do keep an eye open, though, and if you happen to take a good photograph of spring's first signs at the burial ground, do send it through to us for our website.

Summer Open Day 2009

Our next Open Day is booked for Saturday 16 May, from 11 am until 4 pm. Staff will be on hand to talk about the burial ground and answer any queries. There will be tea and homemade cakes for visitors.



Winter Nature Notes

The arrival of winter marks the end of another cycle of growth and the beginning of a period of rest. It is

during this time, when the trees are dormant, that we carry

out our annual programme of planting at Sun Rising. This year, we did no structural planting of trees, focusing instead on the planting of around 40 memorial trees. Trees planted during the dormant season survive better than pot grown trees, which theoretically can be planted at any time of the year but often suffer from stress and dehydration if moved into bright, exposed positions during hot weather. This is especially so at Sun Rising with its heavy clay soil.

Although all trees, even evergreens, replace their leaves periodically, it is only deciduous trees that lose them all at once and remain leafless throughout the winter. The reason for this behaviour isn't linked with levels of sunlight, but with the availability of water. In order for trees to take up water the temperature must be above 2°C. This means that for extended periods during the winter, trees are not able to take up the water they need to keep their leaves hydrated. In order to prevent the leaves simply drying and dying, the trees remove any useful chemicals from them, then let them fall. The autumn colours that we all enjoy so much result from the trees withdrawing green chlorophyll from their leaves and taking it down into the roots where it can be stored until it's needed again in the spring.

Evergreen trees avoid this problem with leaves especially designed to retain water, thereby avoiding dehydration; the waxy leaves of holly and yew, for example, prevent the loss of water. This also means that smaller trees like holly,

which spend the summer months under a dense canopy of shade created by the taller trees around them, can photosynthesise during the winter when other trees are leafless.

As the trees enter a period of inactivity, another component of the woodland flora, fungi, are reaching the peak of their reproductive cycle. The largest part of the fungi in our woodlands and fields are the mycelium, which lay below the ground where they get on with the valuable job of decomposing organic matter. During the autumn these underground mycelium produce the cap and bracket fungi we all recognize: these mushrooms and toadstools produce millions of microscopic windborne spores that will produce a new generation of fungi.

As well as helping to decompose the organic matter that builds up on the woodland floor, many fungi also help the trees to grow. By forming a symbiotic relationship with a tree's root system, the fungi are able to benefit from the sugars produced by the trees; in return they extend the reach of the tree's root system, by taking up water and minerals and feeding them to the tree. Some species of fungi are generalists and will grow on the roots of a variety of trees. Others are specialists and will grow exclusively on one tree species. In the case of fly agaric, the red and white toadstool of fairy tales, this is the birch.

A woodland, then, is much more than just a collection of trees, and is far more than the sum of its parts. As the woodland areas of the burial ground grow, a whole ecosystem of plants, animals and fungi will develop. This process is aided and accelerated by the initial close planting of trees, which produces a dense canopy, so creating conditions conducive to the development of a wildlife-rich environment.



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