

## **BftB Community Arts event - reflections on the Shrill Carder Bee project**

On a warm Saturday in Sept 2019, in the panoramic setting of the Woodland Trust's Victory Wood, Outdoor Studios artists, Sara Trillo and Amanda Thesiger, ran a range of activities inspired by shrill carder bees.

We had been on a site visit prior to the day; and knew that the habitat at Victory Wood supported a few small colonies of shrill carder bees. Considering aspects of the bee's life cycle and habits, we drew inspiration from some key things to design the creative activities; the bees' unique high-pitched buzz, its complex nest construction, the materials it uses and the flowers it forages and feeds from. Some of these activities we knew would take a little time, while others were quick to do, so suiting different age groups and abilities. Always reflecting our artists' own backgrounds and techniques when working with participants and communities - we encourage an investigatory, playful approach to all the education and engagement we undertake. The participants at Victory Wood seemed to really appreciate the consideration and the details in the things they were making. This meant we could introduce and talk about quite specific aspects of the bee's needs - for tussocky grass, late-flowering wildflower types etc.

Specific activities at the event on the 21<sup>st</sup> included making kazoos to create bee sounds using simple household objects (lolly sticks, rubber bands and starch-based straws). When put together as a kind of sound-machine, the resulting vibrations create a fantastic high-pitched buzz, which can be altered to go higher or lower in pitch. Once we made the kazoos, we assembled a Shrill Carder Bee orchestra!

We also used natural beeswax to make model bees - and nests from grasses and clay. These materials reflected some of the nesting habits of the bee and participants worked in a woven and sculptural way to fashion small, simple bee shapes that will fit inside the woven grass bee nests. The grasses could also be used to make the wings and antennae of the bee models.

The third activity was based around simple printmaking, drawing and painting methods; constructing zines/booklets with letter stamps and drawings, and making paintings with inks created from hedgerow plants and berries. Each participant created their own booklet or zine - and built up a few pages in words and pictures, all about the life of the Shrill Carder Bee. This featured portraits of the bee, rubbings and prints of the grasses it nests in or paintings of the bird's foot-trefoil or red clover flowers, made with the natural inks we created for the event. We encouraged everyone to add some thoughts or feelings about the bee with the letter stamps.

We think that everyone who took part went home armed with some clever and fascinating handmade items - and knew a lot more about the Shrill Carder Bee as a result!

Sara Trillo and Amanda Thesiger 2020