

8. Creating a Wildflower Meadow and Helping Wildlife



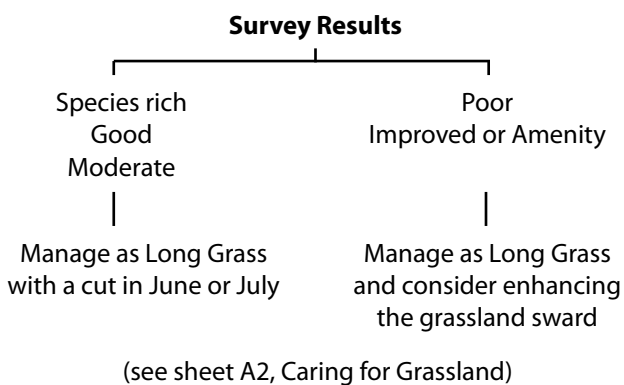
This sheet gives suggestions for getting started with a wildflower meadow and for improving your whole burial site for wildlife.

CREATING A WILDFLOWER MEADOW

Old burial grounds often have fantastic, flowery grassland as they have been so little disturbed over the centuries. A first step to having a wildflower meadow is to mark out the boundary of your planned wildflower patch and leave it to grow long over the spring and early summer. See what comes up naturally and then have a go at surveying it.

Grassland can be full of different plant species regardless of the mowing regime, provided grass cuttings are being collected and removed. Before 'creating' a wildflower meadow, check whether you have one already there, just waiting to be allowed to flower!

The Burial Ground Botanical Companion gives a simple survey which can be done by volunteers, and indicates whether you need to enhance the sward with planting.



Enhancing the Grassland Sward

- Wildflowers can thrive if your grassland is mainly fine, old meadow species such as crested dog's tail and sweet vernal grass. If it is dominated by coarse grasses like cocksfoot and false oat grass then follow the management for 'bringing a neglected site back into management' for at least one year before planting flowers.
- If your site contains other grassland areas which are more rich in wildflowers, then you can swap turfs. Dig

up a couple of turfs (about 30cm square) in autumn or spring from both the flowery and non-flowery areas and swap them over. Keep an eye on them and if the flowers do well, repeat the following year.

- Collect seed from other parts of your burial ground and sow it onto bare ground (molehills are good for this). To create bare ground, roughen the sward with a rake exposing soil over up to a third of the area.
- Buy flower seed or plug plants from a nearby supplier of wildflowers. Check the Flora Locale website, or ask your county wildlife trust for local provenance suppliers, and advice on what to plant. Choose plants that you have seen in nearby verges or meadows; these are likely to be suitable and to do well.
- Try not to let people bring in plants from their gardens as they are unlikely to be native. You can ask them to name their favourite wildflower from the nearby verges and collect seed from there instead.

Yellow Rattle

This plant is really useful in creating and enhancing wildflower meadows. It is a semi-parasitic, meadow annual which attaches itself to neighbouring grasses through the root system and reduces the vigour of the grass.

Where yellow rattle is present you can see that the grass is shorter and less dense. Sow yellow rattle seed in early autumn, so that it over-winters in the soil. Sometimes it doesn't germinate well, so keep trying for several years. You can sow yellow rattle alone in year one, following it up with more yellow rattle plus other wildflowers in year two to get the best chance of all your flowers establishing well.



Yellow Rattle



Centaury



Pyramidal Orchid

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Annual and Perennial

The wildflower meadows described here are mainly made up of perennial plants; plants which live for more than two years, * This is why short grass, properly managed, may still contain many flowering plants which have not flowered or set seed for years.

Don't confuse the flowers of these meadows with cornfield annuals such as poppy, cornflower or corn cockle. These grow in bare soil and plants live for only one growing season.

* There is an exception to this; yellow rattle, which is a traditional plant of meadows, is an annual and so needs to set seed before it is cut.

Once you have created your wildflower meadow, then manage it as you would any other area of long grass (see sheet A2, Caring for Grassland, Long Grass).

STAY ORGANIC

Burial grounds have existed for hundreds of years with no herbicides, pesticides or damaging preservatives, which is one reason why they are so good for wildlife. Please don't change this!

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE!



Try to have a rich variety of habitats on your site. A burial ground with several different features such as trees and shrubs of different ages and shapes, long and short grass, hedges, walls and areas of scrub or coarse vegetation will shelter a great variety of wildlife.

The sum of the whole is greater than the individual parts.

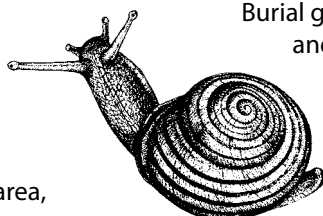
DEADWOOD

Deadwood is fantastic for wildlife. A great many bacteria, fungi, lichens, worms, beetles and other invertebrates live in deadwood. In a natural forest, wood rots down either within a tree or else on the ground. In a burial site you may prefer to have a pile of deadwood away from visited areas or flowery grassland. If there is an area of tussocky grass then this could be a good spot for a deadwood pile.

Creating a good woodpile for wildlife

Pile up any prunings or sections of trees that have been felled. A variety of sizes is ideal as they will rot at different rates. Add to the woodpile whenever you carry out tree work; try to keep it over 50cm tall.

Locate the pile in a fairly shady, damp area,



ideally surrounded by long grass or by trees and shrubs. A woodpile near to a wall or hedge can encourage animals to explore both.

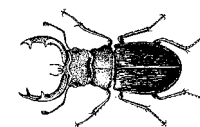
Do not keep the area around the woodpile too tidy; leaves on the ground and coarse vegetation will make the woodpile more likely to attract animals such as slow worms and hedgehogs.

Tree stumps and standing deadwood

If a tree is felled or blows down then consider leaving the stump to rot. Different plants, fungi, birds and animals will use this, particularly if it is quite tall. Perhaps grow a climbing plant on it if the stump is unsightly. Think before you remove deadwood from within a tree. Do you really need to or could it be left for the woodpeckers?

IVY

Ivy provides excellent cover and food for wildlife, and dense ivy may contain nesting birds and roosting bats. Ivy flowers between September and November, providing nectar and pollen when little else is flowering. Ivy can be literally buzzing with bees and flies in the autumn. The fruit is eaten by many birds and small mammals. There may be places where you wish to remove or control ivy, such as veteran yews, but there may be other areas where it can be left. Encourage ivy to flower by teasing top shoots away from their support so that they hang free. (see sheet A9, Pesky Plants and Animals for advice on situations where ivy becomes a problem).



HEDGES, SHRUBS AND SCRUB

Variety is important for conservation so try to have a range of different trees and shrubs to benefit a wider range of creatures. Most burial sites have some mature or veteran trees but is there scope for a hedge?

When planting a new hedge try to use species which will bring wildlife into your site: hedgerow plants with flowers followed by berries and haws. Early or late flowering plants provide food when other plants are not flowering. These are particularly crucial for bumblebees.

Think about managing hedges for wildlife (see sheet A7, Caring for Hedgerows) allowing flowers, fruit and seeds for birds and other animals to feed on.

HABITAT BOXES

Burial grounds often have nooks and crannies for birds and animals for both nesting and over-wintering.

You may want to create some artificial ones, particularly if potential homes have been lost. When rebuilding a section of old dry stone wall, consider making a woodpile nearby and putting a hedgehog box in tussocky

MANAGING CHURCHYARDS AND BURIAL GROUNDS

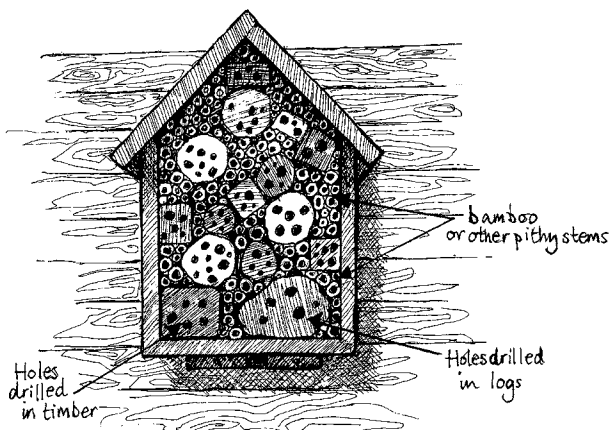
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grass near to the wall.

Habitat boxes also help people to see particular birds and other animals. A blue tit nesting in a box on a tree trunk is easy to watch, the same bird in a scrub thicket nearly impossible!

Put up a nest box for swifts on a church or other tall building. Swifts are in need of homes. Swift boxes can be fitted behind the louvres of a church or chapel tower and will be invisible from the outside.

Bird and bat box designs can be found on the internet or by contacting Caring for God's Acre partner



organisations (see list below). Just enter 'making a nest box/hedgehog home/bat box' etc into an internet search engine.

MAKE A BEE HOTEL

To make a bee hotel fill a frame with hollow canes, such as sections of bamboo, elder or hogweed, bricks with holes, pinecones, straw etc. Basically the idea is to pack together lots of different sized holes which bees and other invertebrates will use.

The frame can be a section of drainage pipe (clay looks more attractive than plastic), a series of shelves made from planks of wood propped up with bricks or a simple wooden box.

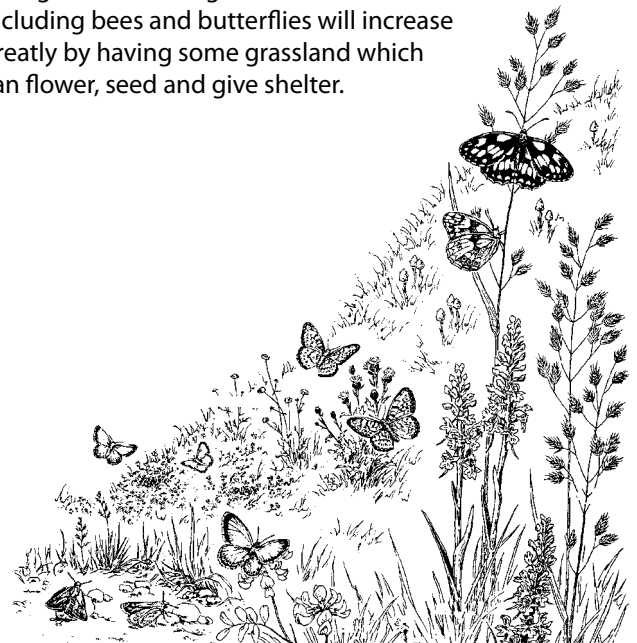
Fix your bee hotel securely in a sunny, sheltered place. It can be built up from the ground or fixed to a fence or wall. This will be used throughout the spring and summer and is a good way to watch insects.

WATER

Drinking water, particularly in times of little rain, can be a life saver. If this is on the ground then animals like birds and hedgehogs can use it. Put a large, flat dish in a shady place.

LONG AND TUSSOCKY GRASSLAND

Try to have an area of long or tussocky grass within your site, even if it is small. A strip against a wall or hedge will provide a corridor for animals such as voles and newts, plus providing a food source for seed-eating birds. The range of invertebrates including bees and butterflies will increase greatly by having some grassland which can flower, seed and give shelter.



Useful contacts

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, www.arc.org.uk

Bat Conservation Trust – bat boxes and encouraging bats, www.bats.org.uk

British Hedgehog Preservation Society – hedgehog homes, www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk

British Trust for Ornithology – National Nest Box Week, www.bto.org

Bumblebee Conservation Trust – bee friendly plants, www.bumblebeeconservation.org

Caring for God's Acre, www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk

OPAL Explore Nature – building a bee hotel, www.opalexplornature.org

RSPB – nest boxes for many bird species including owls, www.rspb.org.uk

Swift Conservation – make a swift nest box, www.swift-conservation.org

Wildlife Trusts – hints on gardening for wildlife, www.wildlifetrusts.org