

10. Surveying for Plants and Animals



This sheet will explain some simple survey methods for you to discover more about your site and how it is changing over time.

A burial site can be managed very well with little surveying of the plants and animals present but it can be interesting to learn more. This gives information for leaflets or talks and can lead to a great sense of achievement as wildflowers, reptiles or breeding birds increase over the years.

Digital photography has made identification much easier than it was. If in doubt take photos of the plant, nest, butterfly or dropping which is puzzling you. Always make a note of the date of a survey or a sighting and please let Caring for God's Acre know what you are finding.

SURVEYING FOR PLANTS

Caring for God's Acre have commissioned a grassland survey specifically for burial grounds called The Burial Ground Botanical Companion. This survey is designed to be done by people who are not botanists, but do have some knowledge of plant types; perhaps a keen gardener? It involves counting the numbers of different plants within an area, without identifying what they are. This is followed by making a list of all of the plants which you can identify. Please download the survey from our website and have a go at it. The Field Studies Council fold-out charts are helpful for getting going, as is The Wildflower Key. We'd love to hear how you get on!

Typical plants of coarse and tussocky grassland include:

False oat grass, cocksfoot, Yorkshire fog and hogweed. In an area of tussocky grass these plants are a sign of good management. If, however, these are increasing in your long grass areas year on year then consider mowing a bit more often (see sheet A2, Caring for Grassland).



Typical plants of fine grassland include:

Finer meadow grasses like sweet vernal grass and crested dog's tail. Flowers include: bird's-foot trefoil, stitchwort, cowslip, betony, ox-eye daisy, lady's bedstraw, scabious and speedwell. If these are staying constant or increasing then give yourselves a pat on the back; your grass cutting regime is working.

Fungi are also good indicators of old grassland and thrive in close mown grass. Record the fungi present on a site and, if you cannot identify them, then take photos of the fungus when fully emerged, ideally showing both the top and underside. Numbers of individual fungi tell you more about the weather than the fungus, but it is interesting to note where they appear on a site.



Early Marsh Orchid

Contact the Association of British Fungus Groups and the Botanical Society. Is there a local group who would be interested in visiting your burial site?

If you cannot identify something then take a photo of it, including as much of the plant as possible (leaves, flowers, seeds). Give it your own name (purple flower, photo 1) until you find someone who can identify it for you.

SURVEYING FOR ANIMALS

Amphibians and reptiles

Slow worms do not often come out into the open but find places to get the warmth of the sun where they can stay out of sight. Put down a 'cover object' such as a piece of corrugated tin, old carpet, plywood or roofing felt. Place this in partial sun, away from visited areas, within an area of tussocky or long grass, near a compost heap or deadwood pile. This needs to be 2ft square or larger. Lift up regularly and check to see if slow worms or

10. Surveying for Plants and Animals

other creatures are underneath. All reptiles are easier to see in spring and autumn or early in the morning on a hot summer's day as it is at these cooler times that they need to bask.

Grass snakes lay their eggs in compost heaps. When you come to empty the compost in the autumn keep an eye out for hatched grass snake eggs which are whitish in colour and leathery. Count egg shells, recording numbers of both hatched and unhatched eggs. You may also find the sloughed skin of a grass snake or slow worm.

See if there is a local [Amphibian and Reptile Group](#) with members who might be interested in visiting your burial ground.

Mammals

You may not see any mammals within a burial ground but can often see tracks and signs.

Look out for: footprints in soft mud, bat droppings below eaves, 'runs' or paths through long grass (these become visible after cutting), gaps and paths through hedges, nests or hair caught on hedges and used in bird's nests.

Contact your local [Mammal Society](#) and see if they would be interested in visiting your site and perhaps doing some live mammal trapping.

Birds

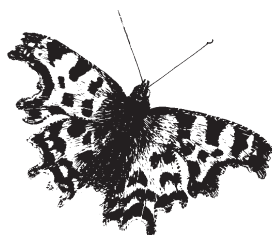
See sheet B4, Swifts and Other Birds, for surveying suggestions. Contact your county bird recorder, wildlife trust or the RSPB to enquire whether there is a local enthusiast to help.

Butterflies and Other Invertebrates

Butterflies are relatively easy to identify and give you an indication of how good your burial site is for other invertebrates too. A site with a good range and number of butterflies is likely to host a great many other species as well. Butterfly Conservation has devised a churchyard survey described below. For a large churchyard or cemetery, simply select more than one 'route'.

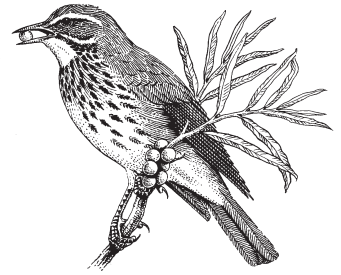
Butterfly Survey

1. Select a route through the churchyard where you see the majority of the butterflies. This route should be as near to 100 meters (strides) in length as possible. It should be a route that can be repeated in future years - preferably following an existing pathway.



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2. Walk the route twice a year; first time on a warm sunny day in May, the second time on a warm sunny day between mid July and mid August. For best results, these walks should be carried out after 11 in the morning and before 4 in the afternoon. Try to choose a day when the wind is not too strong (only a slight breeze should be felt on your face) as butterflies seek shelter in gusty winds and are more difficult to spot.



Redwing

3. Count all the butterflies you see within 2 to 3 meters either side of you. At the end of the walk add up the number of species you have seen and how many of each species you have seen.

Tip; check flower heads such as knapweeds for resting or feeding butterflies.

Results

Please let Caring for God's Acre know if you have carried out this survey and send us your results, your local Butterfly Conservation Group may well be interested too.



Making a biological record

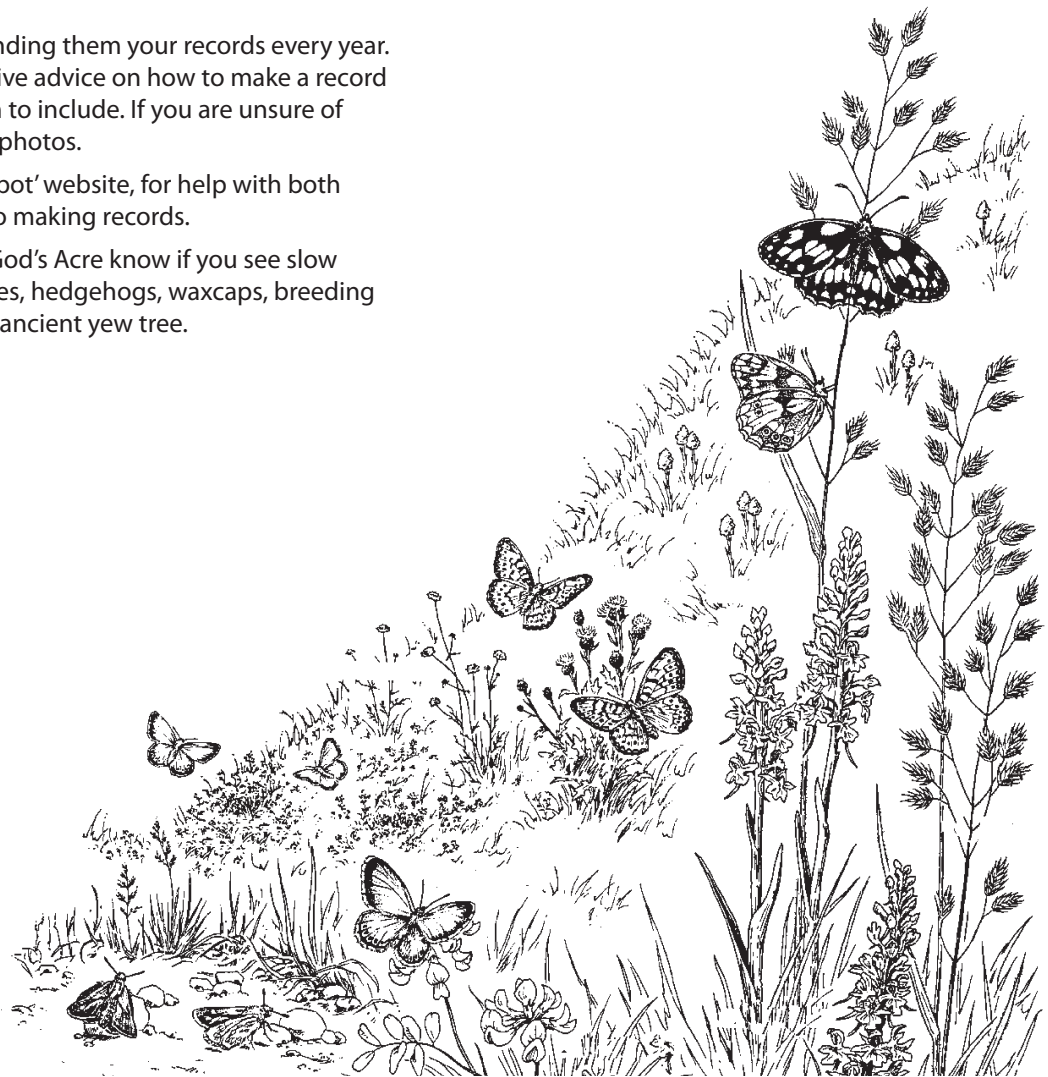
There are national records kept of plant and animal species which have been identified previously. You may have seen these when first finding out about the burial ground (see sheet A1, The Five Steps). Let your local wildlife trust, county recorders or local authority records staff know what you have been seeing and try

10. Surveying for Plants and Animals

to make a habit of sending them your records every year. They will be able to give advice on how to make a record and what information to include. If you are unsure of something then take photos.

Have a look on the 'iSpot' website, for help with both identification and also making records.

Please let Caring for God's Acre know if you see slow worms or other reptiles, hedgehogs, waxcaps, breeding swifts or you have an ancient yew tree.



Useful contacts

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, www.arc-trust.org

Association of British Fungal Groups, www.abfg.org

Botanical Society of the British Isles, www.bsbi.org.uk

Butterfly Conservation, www.butterfly-conservation.org

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

iSpot, www.ispot.org.uk

Mammal Society, www.mammal.org.uk.

Useful reading

The Field Studies Council fold-out charts are an excellent tool for starting to identify and survey wildlife.

Have a look at the Caring for God's Acre one; Guide to Wildlife of Burial Grounds.

The Burial Ground Botanical Companion, Caring for God's Acre.

The Wildflower Key - Francis Rose, Frederick Warne Books.



Bank Vole