

Managing Green Spaces For Nature - Success

Sidmouth Town Council is working with the Sid Valley Biodiversity Group to manage some of its green spaces in a way that supports nature and this is going well.

The first area that was used as a trial was the large verge at The Bowd which STC manages on behalf of Devon Highways. The site comprises two areas of verge each approximately 100m long and tapering from 20m down to 10m wide. The site has some trees, mature Black Poplar and Birch with a line of young fruit trees planted three years ago by Sidmouth Arboretum, but most was rough grassland formerly mown with a rotary mower occasionally through the growing season. The arisings were left where they lay because it was too expensive to collect and clear them. This meant that other flowering plants were suppressed. Apart from two areas planted with daffodils, most of the site was rank grasses such as Yorkshire Fog (*Holcus lanatus*) and Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) with some sporadic flowers but mainly Asteraceae 'weeds' such as Cat's Ears (*Hypochaeris sp.*). There was a small population of Grasshoppers and Crickets but few flying insects.

Two years ago, the partnership with SVBG was established and a trial management regime began. The edges of the site are cut and cleared to create sightline borders but the main area is managed in the manner of a traditional hay meadow, cut twice a year, in spring and late summer. In the first year volunteers collected the arisings to make it easier for the contractor to remove them. Now the contractor has the capacity to cut and collect the arisings. There has been a successful sowing of Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) a semi-parasite that reduces the vigour of the rank grasses to allow other species a chance to establish themselves.

The new regime is already showing a positive impact. A survey on 1st July 2024 recorded 70 different species of herbaceous plant (Appendix 1) compared with only 47 recorded in previous surveys. Apart from the increased diversity, the area of rank grass is visibly reduced and the population of visible flowers is noticeably higher. There are areas where the grass is interspersed with the white stars of Lesser Stitchwort (*Stellaria graminea*) and other areas where the whole ground is covered with spreading mats of Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus pedunculatus*).



Lesser Stitchwort



Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil

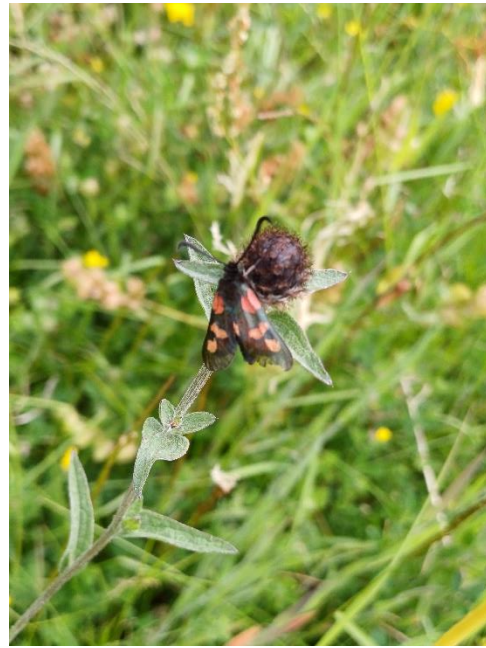
There are at least two losses, one disappointing but one welcome exit. There was a small number of Broad-leaved Helleborines (*Epipactis helleborine*) on the verge. Generally these are plants of the woodland edge, perhaps the long grass used to provide sufficient cover, but there is no sign of them this year. Last year, Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*) was starting to take hold on the wetter parts of the verge. Perhaps the absence of a blanket of wet mulch is having an effect, but the new regime doesn't seem to suit the invasive pest and it hasn't been seen yet this year.

It is not just about wildflowers. The diverse plant populations will support a diverse population of animals, invertebrates such as bees and millipedes, and vertebrates such as voles and birds. There has not been a proper survey of the animals, but the population of Grasshoppers and Crickets is noticeably increased and the newly spreading flowers are being visited regularly by a wide range of

flying insects. Six-spot Burnets have benefitted particularly because Bird's-foot-trefoil is the food plant for their caterpillars.



Carder Bee



Six-spot Burnet

A similar management scheme is evolving on the Brownlands amenity green with equal success. A brief survey recorded 43 plant species (Appendix 2), Meadow Grasshoppers, Dark Bush-crickets and three butterfly species, Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Large Skipper.

This project is enjoying real success but it will require continued commitment. If the cut and clear regime is not maintained then the areas will degenerate into scrub with a consequent loss of plant and animal diversity.

Ed Dolphin
6th July 2024

Appendix 1

Plant Survey Results Bowd Verge 2024-07-01

<i>scientific_name</i>	<i>common_name</i>
Achillea millefolium	Yarrow
Agrostis capillaris	Common Bent
Angelica sylvestris	Wild Angelica
Anthoxanthum odoratum	Sweet vernal grass
Arrhenatherum elatius	False Oat-grass
Artemisia vulgaris	Common Mugwort
Arum maculatum	Cuckoo-pint
Bellis perennis	Common daisy
Bromus hordeaceus	Common soft brome
Calystegia sylvatica	Large bindweed
Cardamine pratensis	Cuckooflower
Centaurea nigra	Common Knapweed
Cerastium fontanum	Common Mouse-ear
Cirsium arvense	Creeping thistle
Cirsium palustre	Marsh Thistle
Cirsium vulgare	Spear Thistle
Convolvulus arvensis	Field bindweed
Crepis capillaris	Smooth hawksbeard
Crepis capillaris	Smooth hawksbeard
Dactylis glomerata	Cock's-foot
Digitalis purpurea	Foxglove
Dioscorea communis	Black Bryony
Epilobium ciliatum	American Willowherb
Epilobium parviflorum	Hoary Willowherb
Galium album	White bedstraw
Galium aparine	Cleavers
Geranium robertianum	Herb Robert
Geum urbanum	Wood Avens
Hedera helix	Common ivy
Heracleum sphondylium	Hogweed
Holcus lanatus	Yorkshire fog
Hyacinthoides x massartiana	Hybrid bluebell
Hypericum androsaemum	Tutsan
Hypericum humifusum	Trailing St John's-wort
Hypericum perforatum	Perforate St John's-wort
Hypochaeris radicata	Common Cat's-ear
Jacobaea vulgaris	Ragwort
Juncus conglomeratus	Compact Rush
Lapsana communis	Nipplewort
Lathyrus pratensis	Meadow vetchling
Lathyrus pratensis	Meadow vetchling
Leucanthemum vulgare	Oxeye daisy
Lotus corniculatus	Common bird's-foot trefoil
Oenanthe crocata	Hemlock Water-dropwort
Plantago lanceolata	Ribwort plantain

Potentilla reptans	Creeping cinquefoil
Primula vulgaris	Primrose
Prunella vulgaris	Common selfheal
Ranunculus acris	Meadow buttercup
Ranunculus repens	Creeping buttercup
Rhinanthus minor	Yellow Rattle
Rhytiadelphus squarrosus	Springy Turf-moss
Rosa agrestis	Small-leaved Sweet-briar
Rosa corymbifera	Hairy dog-rose
Rosa rubiginosa	Sweet-briar
Rubus ag.	Brambles
Rumex acetosa	Common Sorrel
Rumex obtusifolius	Broad-leaved dock
Scrophularia auriculata	Water Figwort
Scrophularia nodosa	Common Figwort
Silene dioica	Red campion
Sonchus asper	Prickly sowthistle
Stellaria graminea	Lesser stitchwort
Taraxacum ag.	Common dandelion
Tragopogon pratensis	Goat's-beard
Trifolium dubium	Lesser Trefoil
Trifolium pratense	Red Clover
Trifolium repens	White clover
Urtica dioica	Common nettle
Vicia sepium	Bush Vetch

Appendix 2

Plant Survey Results Brownlands Community Green 2024-07-06

<i>scientific_name</i>	<i>common_name</i>
<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yarrow
<i>Agrostis capillaris</i>	Common Bent
<i>Agrostis stolonifera</i>	Creeping Bent
<i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i>	sweet vernal grass
<i>Arum maculatum</i>	Cuckoo-pint
Bambusoideae	Bamboo
<i>Bellis perennis</i>	Common daisy
<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	Common Knapweed
<i>Cerastium holosteoides</i>	Common Mouse-ear
<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	Spear Thistle
<i>Crepis capillaris</i>	Smooth hawksbeard
<i>Cynosurus cristatus</i>	Crested dog's-tail grass
<i>Dactylis glomerata</i>	Cock's-foot
<i>Daucus carota</i>	Wild carrot
<i>Epilobium lanceolatum</i>	Spear-leaved Willowherb
<i>Geranium dissectum</i>	Cut-leaved crane's-bill
<i>Geum urbanum</i>	Wood Avens
<i>Hedera helix</i>	Common ivy
<i>Heracleum sphondylium</i>	Hogweed
<i>Holcus lanatus</i>	Yorkshire fog
<i>Hypochaeris radicata</i>	Common Cat's-ear
<i>Jacobaea vulgaris</i>	Ragwort
<i>Leontodon saxatilis</i>	Hairy Hawkbit
<i>Leucanthemum ircutianum</i>	Oxeye daisy
<i>Lolium arundinaceum</i>	Tall fescue
<i>Lolium perenne</i>	Perennial Ryegrass
<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	Common bird's-foot trefoil
<i>Oenanthe pimpinelloides</i>	Corky-fruited Water-dropwort
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	Ribwort plantain
<i>Poa trivialis</i>	Rough Meadow-grass
<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	Common selfheal
<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	Meadow buttercup
<i>Ranunculus repens</i>	Creeping buttercup
<i>Rubus</i> sp.	Brambles
<i>Rumex acetosa</i>	Common Sorrel
<i>Sonchus asper</i>	Prickly sowthistle
<i>Stellaria graminea</i>	Lesser stitchwort
<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>	Common dandelion
<i>Trifolium dubium</i>	Lesser Trefoil
<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	Red Clover
<i>Trifolium repens</i>	White clover
<i>Veronica</i> sp.	Speedwells
<i>Veronica chamaedrys</i>	Germander Speedwell