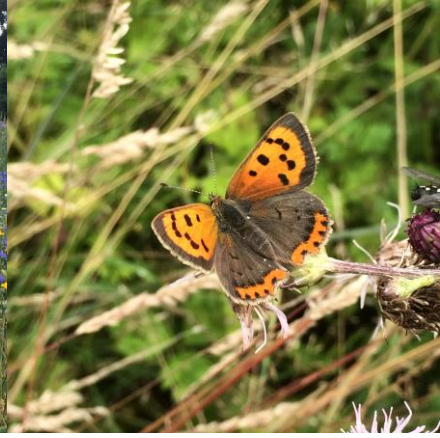


Highnam Wildflower Project – Year 3 review

Highnam Environmental Plan - Objective 1.i Wildflower project – wilding of green spaces via altered mowing regimes and selected planting including designated 'Pollinator Patches'

<u>Pollinator Patches as of 2022:</u>

Patch 1 - Mary Grove (3 areas, 1 at each end of field plus area under trees)
Patch 2 - Oakridge opp. Poole Ground
Patch 3 - Oakridge nr. Monkey Bank
Patch 4 - Maidenhall
Patch 5 – Wetherleigh
Patch 6 – Butterfly Crescent
Patch 7 – Oakridge nr John's Wood 1
Patch 8 – Oakridge nr John's Wood 2

Wildflower survey areas 2022

★ Pollinator Patches (numbered)

Patch 7 and 8 – added for 2022 following the installation of the footpath around Oakridge in October 2021 which left these 2 areas of bare earth.

Autumn 2022 Review

The agreed 2022 Plan:

1. We had a very useful walk-around with the TBC and Ubico grounds managers in March 2022 to discuss the mowing of the green spaces and the locations of the pollinator patches. The installation of the new footpath meant that Ubico were having to implement a new plan for mowing as the large (tractor) mower would no longer be suitable for much of the Oakridge green space.
2. Two new pollinator patches along the Oakridge footpath were agreed and were to be sown with a native perennial wildflower meadow mix by the EWG in the Spring. The EWG confirmed they would mark out all patches with wooden stakes (which were to be left in-situ for the whole summer at the request of Ubico). All green spaces, with the exception of Mary Grove field, were to be mown by the small mower, following the usual 3 to 4 week schedule. Mary Grove field was to be mown by the large mower every 6-8 weeks.
3. To reduce the area of the Wetherleigh patch, de-turfing a proportion to sow wildflower seeds in April/May.
4. No changes were required for the remaining patches.
5. Community involvement – the wildflower survey group, made up of 10 community volunteers to do the annual survey of quadrats in all established pollinator patches.
6. Volunteers to cut the vegetation within the patches during August. Cuttings were to be raked off and left as habitat piles in suitable locations.

How did we do?

Pollinator Patches:

Patch 1 - Mary Grove
Perennial rye and annual meadow grasses still dominate in the original patch, with limited flowers due to shading from the trees within in the patch. However, the area provides a good refuge for wildlife. Cinnabar moth caterpillars were seen feeding on ragwort at the end of summer. The extension of the southern end of the patch resulted in a good covering of wildflowers, with the botanical surveyors noting that there was more corky-fruited dropwort than last year. Volunteers recorded 12 species of wildflowers flowering in the unmown area, compared with 6 in the mown area.

Patch 2 - Oakridge opp. Poole Ground
This has developed well as a species rich perennial meadow patch. It is the best patch we have for floristic diversity and nectar provision. 25 species of wildflowers and grasses were recorded in the whole patch, including a bee orchid spotted for the first time this year. The yellow rattle plug plants from last year had self-seeded successfully and will hopefully help with weakening the grasses and allow more dominance of wildflowers. A good variety of pollinators and other wildlife were recorded using this patch, such as common blue butterflies and white-tailed bumblebees.

Patch 3 - Oakridge nr Monkey Bank
This natural regeneration patch was reduced in extent this year due to the footpath being installed. The area under the trees was dominated by selfheal, birds foot trefoil and cat's ear, with bee orchids also being seen. The open area continued to be predominantly flowering grasses, although there is a lovely display of speedwells in late spring/early summer.

Patch 4 – Maidenhall
The yellow rattle plug plants sown last year had self-seeded well. 22 different species of wildflowers and grasses were surveyed in this patch this year, an improvement on the 14 recorded in 2021. Further nursery beds will be seeded in late spring 2023 to continue to try to maintain the burst of colour.

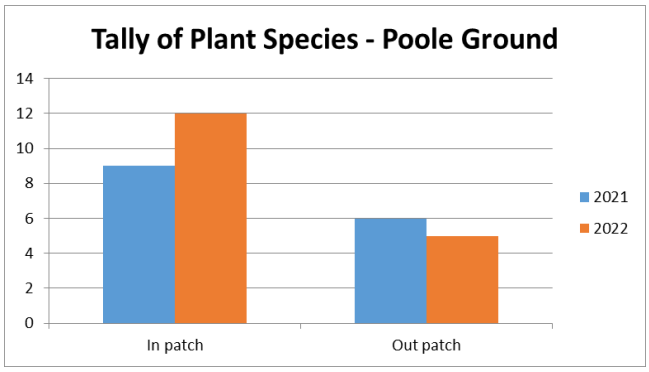
Patch 5 - Wetherleigh Drive
The size of this patch was reduced for 2022, so that a smaller semi-circle remained. This was de-turfed and resown with annuals, and larger perennial plants in late spring. A late summer bloom of poppies and oxeye daisies improved the visual aspect of this patch.

Patch 6 – Butterfly Crescent
This woodland edge area, comprising grassland scrub and known as the Butterfly Crescent was monitored for the first time this year. The area hasn't seen any management activity since before the covid pandemic and therefore much of the self-seeded ash, oak and blackthorn saplings have regrown, to the detriment of the grasses and wildflowers. 14 species of wildflowers and grasses were recorded, compared with 22 in the previous year. The EWG has now restarted management activities in this area.

Botanical surveying:

Ten residents continue to carry out the annual botanical surveys of the pollinator patches. Each survey requires one quadrat inside the patch and a second one outside of the patch in order to assess the effect of the reduced mowing on the floristic

diversity of the grass areas. Results are input into a spreadsheet and a timeline of the tally of plant species graphed.



Report from Ubico (via TBC):

No comments or issues arising from Ubico this year.

Issues arising:

1) Several of the stakes were broken/removed at the Oakridge/Monkey Bank patch, which meant the area was mown once during the summer. Going forwards, the EWG will endeavour to replace stakes as soon as possible.

2) Butterfly Crescent – TBC received a complaint from a resident (a local representative of Butterfly Conservation) concerned about over-mowing in the southern end of this area. A grassy area had been mown twice during the summer season, disrupting the butterflies' lifecycles and therefore having a detrimental impact on butterfly populations. The EWG had not staked out this particular area as it had not realised that it was within the remit of the Butterfly Crescent conservation plan. For 2023 it is proposed that the EWG clearly mark out the boundary of this area with wooden stakes, so that the grasses can be left to grow. The advice from the Butterfly Conservation representatives is that the area remains uncut, to provide habitat for overwintering caterpillars and allow the butterfly lifecyles to be completed. The EWG propose to put some additional information signs in the area to explain to residents why these actions are being taken.

Community involvement:

- **Articles** written and published in the 'Village Link' magazine updating on the pollinator patch progress and asking for volunteers to get involved with botanical surveying.
- **Information signs:** In addition to main pollinator patch signs, small signs were again used to help identify interesting species and highlight their importance for wildlife.
- **Volunteer work parties** 'cut and collect' the vegetation from all the patches. Cuttings from all were removed to a discrete area to be left to rot down, taking care to ensure they were not left anywhere near ditches.
- **Facebook posts:** EWG members posting on 'Wild Highnam' community facebook page.

- **National coverage:** a resident had a letter published in the October 2022 issue of the BBC's Gardeners' World magazine complimenting the council on creating the pollinator patches and leaving the wildflowers to bloom that border the new footpath. The letter was titled 'Verge of greatness'!

Plan for 2023

Modifications to the following Pollinator Patches are proposed:

- **2) Poole Ground –** it is proposed that this patch be extended north by approximately 10m as far as the next street light. This will incorporate a small patch of wildflowers that flowered in an area of bare earth left from the footpath installation. The EWG will plant yellow rattle plug plants and sow some native perennial seeds in this new area to help establish it.

- **3) Oakridge near Monkey Bank –** it is proposed that the western side of this patch is extended to incorporate the area on the roadside of the new footpath. This area had been part of the patch prior to the footpath being installed, and several bee orchids had been seen by the tree.
- **6) Butterfly Crescent –** the southern end of the crescent will be staked out and left unmown throughout the year, in order to provide a summer, and overwintering habitat for butterflies and caterpillars. In subsequent years, if required, a chequer-board approach to cutting this area will be undertaken by the Wild Highnam volunteers, on behalf of the EWG.
- **8) Oakridge nr John's Wood 2 –** it is proposed that this patch is extended northwards by ~30m as a trial to assessing the acceptability to residents of a larger swathe of uncut area. The extension is predominantly under a small copse of trees, and it will be interesting to see what the predominant flora will be.

A key consideration in leaving larger areas unmown is the ability of the volunteers to cut the vegetation at the end of the summer, plus the availability of a suitable area to leave the cuttings to rot down. This year, the volunteers found that a long reach hedgetrimmer provided the best option for cutting the pollinator patches, especially as it was done early in August before the grasses had gone over. However, it is a time-consuming process, especially as we are reliant on one volunteer owning this tool. The use of a strimmer was also trialled, but it tends to shred the grasses which makes the raking and collecting a much harder job. The ideal scenario is to be able to use a petrol driven Allen scythe – so far the EWG has not been able to find anywhere closer than Bristol that has Allen scythes for hire.

Conclusion

In summary, the Highnam Parish Environmental Group is very pleased with the way that the Highnam Wildflower Project is progressing. The natural regeneration approach requires more patience and a longer term commitment to enable the wildflower patches and maintenance procedures to get established, but the goal of increased biodiversity, with minimal cost is looking achievable.