

# Wild flowers at Plumpton Station



We were delighted to be invited to put forward ideas for enhancing the land adjacent to the station as part of the Adopt-a-Station scheme and even more delighted when our proposals for creating and managing areas for wild flowers were accepted.

Over the summer the grassland on the side of the up platform and in the fenced area by the down platform will not be cut so that the wild flowers that are already there can set seed.

There is a splendid display of oxeye daisies in the fenced area as a result of stopping cutting this spring. In the autumn, we will cut the vegetation severely. Then we will rake it hard and create some bare patches in which we will sow wild flower seed. We will keep the vegetation cut until the spring and then leave it to flower throughout the spring and summer.

You may ask why we are doing this? Wild flower meadows are disappearing. After centuries of traditional management for hay, agricultural changes – herbicide and fertiliser application, ploughing and reseeding with vigorous grasses – have resulted in monocultures of grass. As the wild flowers disappear, the bees, butterflies and other insects that depend on them for nectar and pollen also decline. But we can act to stop this decline if we want to by managing areas of grassland that have not been ‘improved’ by fertiliser, ploughing and reseeding appropriately.

We would like to see Plumpton richer in wild flowers than it is at present and there are several places in which this could be achieved quite easily. Already part of the playing field is being managed for wild flowers thanks to the Parish Council and some residents encourage wild flower meadows in their gardens. As I write this our front garden is full of common spotted orchids and yellow rattle, the latter sown to suppress the coarse grasses, as well as many other native flowers.

Some of us surveyed the three churchyards recently to discover what wild flowers grew there. Churchyards are often the best places in our farmed landscape for wild flowers because they haven’t been subjected to

agricultural improvement. We recorded a total of 69 wild flowers species for All Saints', 39 for East Chiltington and 28 for St Michael's. It is interesting that the newest church has the richest plant communities. Many of you will have admired the green-winged orchids there this spring, which are left to flower and seed in a small patch of the front lawn. There are also common spotted orchids there for us to enjoy, thanks to the current management.

Jacqui Hutson

August 2010