

The blossom and the bees



Maybe some of you will have seen Sarah Raven's recent TV series, *Bees, Butterflies and Blossoms*, in which she drew attention to the decline in our pollinating insects and the need to return bee-friendly flowers to our towns and gardens. I don't know how her campaign is going, but our very own efforts to bring back wild flowers to the parish have borne fruit and we have some good news to report.

The Parish Council has embraced our idea of a new wild-flower meadow as part of this year's Jubilee celebrations. We are working with Clare Eastwood and the contractor to manage the little-used, north-eastern part of King George V playing field, the part that dips down towards the Bevern Stream, as a Jubilee wild flower meadow. When we inspected it in November we could see that there were already many wild flower species growing there – they just have never been allowed to flower. From this year the mowing regime will change so that this part of the field will not be cut until late summer/early autumn.

The meadow at The Plough is also rich in wild flower species and we are delighted to announce that the landlord Dave Hunter is keen to manage a large part of it for wild flowers – again it will be left uncut until late summer and then probably grazed by sheep to keep it short in the winter. This meadow is full of promise and as I write the hedgebanks are studded with primroses. Do go and have a drink there one summer's day and see what is blooming.

Three years ago we surveyed the roadside verges in the parish and identified four that would, managed appropriately, be good for wild flowers. Now The Parish Council and County Ecologist have agreed to designate these verges as wild flower verges and they will be left uncut until late summer. In January some of us helped with the restoration of a verge in Novington Lane by raking off the thick mulch of grass left after cutting. This verge had been neglected for a while and its once large population of orchids had declined, with the plants smothered by vigorous grasses. We hope that our intervention will help restore the orchids and the other wild flowers to their former glory.

Our wild flower sowings at the station are beginning to yield results – cowslips flowered for the first time this spring.

If you are interested in managing your meadows for wild flowers do let us know – we are happy to advise. Some areas will need a different mowing or grazing regime to encourage different plants. And if you want to make a difference with very little effort, just let your grass grow a little longer than usual so that clover and other low-growing flowers such as self-heal can blossom – the bees will love them.

Jacqui Hutson

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