

Solihull Habitat and Nature Improvements

A programme of woodland, grassland, wetland and water quality improvements

This project has enabled almost 30 hectares of meadow improvements to five parks.

What is a meadow?

A meadow is grassland which is not regularly grazed or cut, but instead allowed to grow to produce hay. Meadows that contain a large range of different grass and wildflower species have usually developed over long periods of time as a result of traditional farming practices. Historically each farm would have had permanent pasture for grazing, and meadows for hay that was cut and stored to feed the livestock over winter.



Enhancing our meadows

Before improvements, the grassland of this park had few types of grass and wildflowers, which meant limited ecological value. Therefore seed was collected from local species-rich meadows, cutting the native wildflowers and grasses in late summer just after flowering. This 'green hay' was brought to this park and spread, so that the seed had the chance to germinate and enhance the grassland for wildlife and people.



Managing our meadows

Regular yearly cutting will help to create a healthy meadow. The grass will receive an annual hay cut between July and August, which is the best time to mow meadows for both wildlife and practical hay making considerations. Parts of the meadow may be left uncut so that later flowering species can seed and to provide areas of longer grass as an opportunity for some insects and small mammals.



Why are meadows important?

Meadows attract a multitude of wildlife that could not thrive in other habitats. A species-rich meadow can contain over 40 species of plants per square metre, along with a huge diversity of other wildlife species including fungi, reptiles, amphibians, small mammals, bats, birds and insects including bees and butterflies.

Over 97% of the UK's meadows have been lost since the 1930s, when they were ploughed and the soil fertilised to grow food during the Second World War. That's three million hectares – an area one-and-a-half times the size of Wales. Species-rich grassland now only covers a mere 1% of the UK's land area.

Beechcroft Local Nature Reserve and Open Space

Grasslands at the Local Nature Reserve and the open space have been enhanced as part of this project. Prior to the interventions both grasslands were identified as species poor, with the Local Nature Reserve slightly richer.

Green hay was brought from Shadowbrook Meadow, Hampton-in-Arden, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) meadow managed by the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and open to the public to visit.

Some species of animals and plants found in the meadow



Meadow foxtail (*Alopecurus pratensis*) is a common perennial tufted grass. It gets its name from its long cylindrical flower heads that look like foxes' tails. It can grow up to one metre tall and is one of the first grass species to flower in the year. The flower heads range in size from 3cm to 6cm long. As a long grass, it also provides an important habitat for a variety of invertebrate species.



Marbled white (*Melanargia galathea*) is a white butterfly, with black-chequered markings. Adults are found throughout the summer in flowery grassland with woodland rides and road verges. The adults can often be seen feeding on purple flowers, such as field scabious. The caterpillars feed on a variety of grasses, such as red fescue and Yorkshire fog.

Goat's-beard (*Tragopogon pratensis*) is a medium to tall plant similar to dandelions, with bright yellow flower heads which only open in the morning sunshine – hence the alternative name of 'Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon.' The flowers develop into a 'seed clock' where individual seeds are 'parachuted' away from the plant to be carried by the wind.



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