

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.



Species-rich meadow

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.



Spreading green hay

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.



Making hay at Elmdon Nature Park

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.

Cole Bank Park

Prior to the interventions the area enhanced by this project was identified as species poor grassland, dominated by aggressive grasses with few wildflowers.

Green hay was brought from Brook Meadow, Bakers Lane, Dorridge, 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



Cock's-foot (*Dactylis glomerata*) is a common, tussocky grass of grasslands, woodland rides and cultivated ground. Its fluffy, pinky-beige flower heads appear on long stalks and give the impression of a bird's foot, hence the common name. Its leaves have sharp edges, giving a nasty cut if pulled the wrong way. This tall perennial plant grows vigorously, colonising quickly and overshadowing smaller, more delicate flowers and grasses. Its tussocks provide shelter for small mammals and invertebrates.



Great burnett (*Sanguisorba officinalis*) is a perennial which prefers damp grasslands and floodplain meadows. A tall plant, its stems can reach 1.2 metres tall, ending in oval, crimson flowers throughout the summer. Burnet wine was traditionally made from its flower heads. The Latin name *Sanguis* (blood) and *sorba* (absorb) points to its medicinal use to stop the flow of blood, including nosebleeds. It can also be used to treat burns and insect bites.

The **gatekeeper** (*Pyronia tithonus*) is found in grasslands, field edges and hedgerows. It has two distinctive white spots on the wings. As a caterpillar it feeds on grasses with the butterfly favouring wild marjoram, ragwort and brambles. The caterpillars hibernate in September when they are still quite small. They become active again from March and achieve full growth by late May or early June. At this point, they pupate to become adults.



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