

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.

Colebrook Recreation Ground

Colebrook Recreation Ground has had two areas of grassland enhanced – the area around the football pitch and the meadow next to the brook.

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



Sweet vernal grass (*Anthoxanthum odoratum*) is a common perennial of grasslands and meadows that flowers between April and July. It has dense clusters of flowers which form cylindrical flower spikes on stiff stems, which can grow to 50cm tall. It provides food for the larvae of brown and skipper butterflies. It has a vanilla-like scent and when cut as part of a hay crop it is this plant that gives hay its sweet smell.

Bird's-foot trefoil is a wide-spread grassland species. Its yellow flowers look like little slippers and are followed by seed pods that look like bird's feet, hence the common name. It is a food plant for 160 species of insects including bees and butterflies, which in turn support birds such as skylarks and lapwings. It's also known as 'Eggs and Bacon' and 'Hen and Chickens'.



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The **small copper butterfly** (*Lycaena phlaeas*) is common in meadows and woodland clearings. Males are territorial and they behave aggressively towards other males and any passing insects. Adults can be seen feeding on ragwort and thistles, while the caterpillars feed on common sorrel and sheep's sorrel. The butterfly spends the winter in its caterpillar form, hiding in plants such as ivy and shrubs.



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