

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.

Elmdon Nature Park

Former farmland was used for Elmdon Nature Park in 1999, which further extended the public open spaces of Elmdon Park. To create the informal park a native wildflower and grass seed mix was sown across the fields and a stone path was added in a circular route.

This project enhanced the grassland by spreading green hay from Draycote Meadow, near Rugby, 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

Yorkshire fog grass (*Holcus lanatus*) is the most widely distributed native grass and can be found in all grasslands, on wasteland, in open woodland and in damp or water-logged areas, and provides a food source for caterpillars and rabbits. It is a perennial grass which grows up to one metre tall, with colourful purple/red flower heads. It is said that Yorkshire fog grass was given the name because, from a distance, it resembles the smoke that once billowed from the chimneys of northern factories.



Meadow vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*) is a member of the pea and clover family that can be found scrambling and climbing through grassy areas, including meadows and rough grassland, roadside verges and waste ground. Yellow flowers appear in clusters between May and August – attracting bees and wasps – and turn into black seed pods.



The **Field vole** (*Microtus agrestis*) is one of the UK's most common mammals with a population of 75 million. It is active day and night, eating seeds, roots and leaves. It is difficult to spot in its grassland habitat where they move along the ground through a network of well-used runs that lead to their burrows. It is an extremely important part of the diet of many predators, such as kestrels, weasels and barn owls. They can produce three to six litters of up to seven young a year.



©Margaret Holland



European Union

European Regional
Development Fund

This project is part funded
by the European Regional
Development Fund



Solihull
METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL