

***Little Stretton Wildflower Verges
And Hedgerows Project***

Final Report



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Surveys

As a group we walked around the village and decided on the verges we would survey. Our intention was to designate verges that we would try to enhance and those we would survey to see what was the range of wild flower plants. The verges we would try to enhance would be the ones on the 'B' road running through the village that had been routinely strimmed several times during the growing season (see map).

The first surveys of our verges were undertaken in April and June, 2020. Our original intention had been to use the expertise and advice of an ecologist, as the group, though enthusiastic, were lacking in plant identification skills. However, due to Covid restrictions this was not possible. Despite our lack of expertise the surveys were carried out and did give us a clearer indication of the situation with regard to our verges and hedgerows. We were aided by the flower recognition guides and the hand lenses we were able to purchase from the Field Studies Council.

In May and June 2021 we carried out further surveys, this time with the assistance of ecologist Rob Rowe. This assistance was invaluable. It greatly enhanced our plant ID skills and this was shown in the increase in plants identified in our surveys. (See attached survey sheets giving a comparison).

Here are some comments made by group members after the training sessions with Rob Rowe:

It was a joy to participate in the plant ID session on Monday, and it was a privilege to have someone as knowledgeable and passionate as Rob with us to help us widen our understanding. It is amazing just how much there is to see and to learn. Julie.

The recent Plant ID training with Rob Rowe was both enjoyable and very informative. There is no better way to learn than being shown a plant in the field. The knowledge gained from this course will be a great help in recording species when doing our surveys. Karen

It was really helpful having access to an expert, to take the ID off the page, to point out the specific features and give more hands-on tips not found in the concise text of an ID book - like rubbing a particular stem on your top lip to determine if it was rough or smooth, to point out particular scents or point out contrasting features from similar species.

Having a botanist standing by to confirm your IDs really helps build confidence in your skills - it's not just a shot in the dark, you know whether you've got it right or wrong and can grow through it.

Many of us learn more from asking questions and building on knowledge than by simply referring to a book. I learned more from spending two hours with Rob than I would have done from twice that time poring over ID guides and the internet. Holly

Practical Verges Restoration Work

In May, 2020 the group planted over 300 wild flower plugs, grown from seed by volunteers. Unfortunately, due to drought conditions and some over-enthusiastic strimming by two gardeners (ignoring signs we had made asking not to strim) we were not as successful as we had hoped.

In October, 2020 we carried out work on the verges selected for enhancement – cutting, removing vegetation, scarifying and sowing Yellow Rattle seed. We acquired signs from the National Trust, Stepping Stones project and AONB. In a bright yellow colour and with the logos of these organisations we hoped they would provide more protection than our home-made signs.

In January, 2021 we purchased more seed and distributed the seed amongst the group to sow and grow on as plugs. In April, May and June, as individuals or in pairs, we planted out the plugs.

This year we have been far more successful and we now have the following flowers established, though some flourishing more than others:

Red Champion, Birdsfoot Trefoil, Lesser Knapweed, Field Forget Me Not, Field Scabious, Ragged Robin, Corn Marigold, Yarrow, Lady's Bedstraw. The Yellow Rattle has done well and we will collect seed from the flowers over the next few weeks. We recently have also have planted Wild Primrose and Musk Mallow and hope to see those do equally as well.

Included are photos taken of Verges 6 and 8, before and after our work. Also included are the surveys of Verge 8 taken last year and this. Hopefully they will give a clearer picture of the progress we have made. It must be pointed out that the improvement in Verge 8 shown by the surveys is not only down to our enhancement work. There is also the improvement in our identification skills and the fact that last year and this no strimming took place until we were ready to cut ourselves. This enabled existing plants to emerge.

The Future

It has been difficult to operate without being able to meet as a group to discuss our work and to plan for the future. Communication with the whole group has had to be done through email. Not really very satisfactory. However, we intend to have our first group meeting in September where we will review our progress and make plans for the future. I will be putting to the group the following suggestions and, of course, I am sure that other suggestions will be made:

- Continue to sow Yellow Rattle from the seeds we have stored.
- As well as working on Verges 6 and 8, make a concerted effort to bring Verge 1 up to the same standard. This will involve removing hogweed.
- Consider taking on the task of strimming and removing the vegetation on two of the lanes leading from the village to the A49, Verges 5 and 7. This will be a great deal of additional work but will give the wild flowers there more chance to flourish.
- Encourage more villagers to join our group.
- Make small signs identifying some of the wild flowers, to place in the verges. As well as being helpful to villagers and visitors it will generate interest in our work.

Bernard Ford,
June, 2021