



Making Meadows – Bath Area Meadows Group

The Bath Area Meadows Group is a loose affiliation of meadow owners, managers and people with an interest in meadows in the Bath area. It was initiated by the Bathscape Landscape Partnership (www.bathscape.co.uk) as a series of online and in-person workshop sessions, with attendees or those expressing an interest added to the group.

Since 2018 the Bathscape Scheme has worked on several meadow creations in and around the city, its partners have developed their own meadows and individual members of the Bath Area Meadows Group have done more again. They range from a few square metres of lain wildflower turf to several acres of seed broadcasting. This document brings together some of their experiences.

Examples of sites that have diversified naturally or with minimal intervention through changing the management

Best practice for any site is to see what appears naturally, letting it grow long through April/May and into June. If a site shows an encouraging level of diversity then simply switching to a routine of standard meadow management may be all you need to do. The hillsides around Bath are typically limestone with poor soils which favour wildflowers, and provided they haven't been heavily fertilized many such sites can revert to species-rich grassland under the right management, particularly those on steeper slopes.

Park Corner, Freshford

Rowena writes:

Around 15 years ago, after many years of cutting a large area of grass in our garden, in the Park Corner area of Freshford, we were inspired by the number of wildflower meadows being established and decided to stop cutting part of the grassed area and see what happened. When we had bought the property in 1980, this part of the garden was a small area of pasture which had been used for occasional grazing by sheep. We did not want to strip off topsoil and sow a mix of meadow grasses and flowers, as we very much wanted to echo the local wildflowers which used to be so prolific in the fields around us but had unfortunately mostly been lost with different farming uses of the land.

We started reading about creating a meadow and visited a number of long-established meadows run by local Wildlife Trusts and Goren Farm, near Honiton and realised we had to reduce the fertility of the soil to enable wildflowers to establish. And that was when we discovered the amazing power of Yellow rattle to feed off the nutrients of surrounding grass roots. Traditionally, a field with Yellow rattle would be viewed by farmers as being very low in nutrients, but this is the environment in which delicate, traditional wildflower species can gradually establish themselves.

Having roughly scarified just a few very small areas of our grassland, we scattered Yellow rattle seeds in August, this being the time when the seeds traditionally ripen and drop. The first Spring after sowing, we could see that in the areas where the seed had been scattered, the grass was definitely not growing with the vigour of the surrounding areas. Then gradually year on year, the Yellow rattle has spread out across the meadow area from the original patches which had been sown.

With the fertility of the grass reducing each year, the wildflowers and less vigorous grasses have, over the years, increased exponentially. For the first eight or nine years, we were still getting a large number of dandelions, as these are very dominant in the surrounding fields but even these have now become less prominent, but enough of them for early seekers of nectar and pollen.

Fifteen years on and the meadow is a delight from early spring right through to early September. If it has been particularly wet in late winter and early spring, we have a large flowering of Milkmaids (Lady's smock) and then follows a succession of Bird's foot trefoil, Ribwort plantain, Yellow rattle, Lady's bedstraw, Meadow buttercup, Common knapweed, Salad Burnett, Cat's ear, Fox and Cubs and Field scabious, amongst others. All of these plants just emerged – the seed had evidently just laid dormant for many years but with the fertility dramatically reduced, they burst into growth. Cowslips grow in abundance in some of the local fields and I raised a number from seed around four years ago and this Spring we saw the beginnings of them spreading and naturalising. The only other introduced species was the planting of camassia bulbs as the intense blue sets of the yellow covering of buttercups in late Spring.

The most thrilling sight was the emergence of Common spotted orchids in one area of the meadow – just five in around the fifth year of starting to allow the meadow to naturalise. And every year, this number has pretty well doubled and in the last three years, Pyramidal orchids have also made an appearance, doubling in number each year and then last year, we had Early purple orchids – 5 in number and now 12 this year.

As yet, no Meadow cranesbill has appeared, which is strange as it used to flourish amazingly well in some of the surrounding fields, but we are always hopeful that one year we may see some. This is one of the joys of the meadow - seeing some new species appear for the first time, like Oxeye daisies which arrived in a small area about 3 years ago, but it just shows how different conditions suit different species.

There are a number of trees in the lower part of the meadow where the spread of Yellow rattle has been very slow. This area is shaded by the trees and with leaf drop, even though we remove as many leaves as possible, the ground is far more fertile. This area is colonised by Cow parsley and Yarrow but gradually as the Yellow rattle creeps in, the fertility is lowering each year.

Maintenance of the area is minimal. We cut a path through the meadow in April and keep this mown through the summer but that is all the cutting we do until early September, when we cut the hay off the whole meadow area. We turn the hay daily to dry it and then rake and remove it. We then do one further run over the area with a mower in late September, again removing any growth. We stack the hay in a large wire ring, and it gradually composts down over the following two years.

To walk through this meadow at any time from April to September is an absolute joy – always some new growth to discover and far too much time is spent just watching and hearing all the bees, butterflies, moths and insects collecting nectar and pollen.

So a very extended establishment of the area but what has been so rewarding is seeing how many species of flowers and grass have appeared.



Shaft Road, Monkton Combe

David writes:

We have 3 repurposed areas.

One part of a field now divided into a Hay Meadow that is cut for hay. The second part is left uncut at present it being too rough or steep. The third section has been planted as an arboretum.

When we first bought our field we grazed it with beef cattle, as had the farmer before apart from an old orchard section (Cider and Perry apple trees). The next stage was horses, the field divided up into paddocks and a small cross-country area. When our daughters left home and my wife Diana's horse died we decided to try converting a very small area into a wild flower area.

The Walled Garden grass is now left uncut except for access paths. Last year we had a good number of Common purple orchids and a few Lady's smock and Oxeye daisies. In the paddock area the top bank has had for several years displayed many types of wildflowers including Yellow rattle, Cowslips, Common orchids and a few Bee orchids, plus Knapweed, Hawkbit, Wild carrot, Yarrow.

The middle area of the paddock we have adopted the same method of only cutting access paths and cutting the rest in August/September and if suitable making it into hay.

Success has been due to the extended spread of Yellow rattle over several years. It seems to struggle to spread in shady areas. We still have several areas that only grow coarse grass and intend to use our own Yellow rattle seed into these areas. We have done this in the field. Hay is cut by a ride on mower raked up into rows by hand and then turned until dry enough to bag up. The hay is then fed to the local donkeys.



Combe Down

Jane writes:

The wilding of my garden, on the south edge of Bath has been evolving over the last ten years. It is an advantage that it is on the edge of a surface stone quarry. This accounts for the poor soil which has naturally encouraged a diversity of limestone flora.

The garden is naturally divided into two areas. A lower area nearest the house and the top of the garden. Mown paths are an attempt to make the garden look managed rather than neglected.

The lower area is cut once a year in the autumn and the arisings removed. The only species that I have introduced is Yellow rattle which has successfully suppressed the coarser grasses. There is very little grass now but a lot of moss as the surface is quite compacted and rather too many Ribwort plantains.

The plants include, Primroses, Selfheal, Early purple and Pyramidal orchids as well as speedwells. scabious, mallow, Bird's-foot trefoil, bedstraws, hawkweeds, thistles and Fox and cubs. I control the numbers of the thistles and ragwort.

This year I have had more butterflies than usual, these include Ringlets, Wall browns, Fritillary, as well as Gatekeepers and later in the year there will be Red admirals and Peacock butterflies. The Bath Nats moth group come every year and they seem impressed with the numbers and range of moths caught in their moth trap.

The top area of the garden is a work in progress, the grass is taller, and more rank, and the flower species are fewer in number. The wildflowers include Yellow rattle, introduced by me, and a big clump of Marjoram. The top of the garden is also home to slow worms, up to twenty at a time which shelter in the summer under some sheets that I have laid on a bank. More frequently recently a grass snake or snakes shelter under the sheets. In the top corner of the garden is a large pile of compost and woody cuttings which I leave to provide shelter for insects etc in the winter. In the autumn I will strim the whole area and remove the arisings. Apart from strimming the vegetation I also control the bramble.

My wildlife friendly garden has benefited from benign neglect and apart from some targeted control of the more rampant species and annual mowing it has been very low maintenance.



Friary, Freshford

Penny writes:

We tried the textbook method of close cutting, scarifying the soil, planting Yellow rattle and specialist seeds and then running sheep over the ground at set times of the year, but found this did not produce results and was a considerable waste of time and money.

It seems that the soil on our land contained an historic seed bed of its own and all that it needed was for the dormant seeds to be awakened and given a chance to thrive. Rather like transplanting local saplings, rather than buying in stock, we were advised by a local gardener that seeds adapted to the microclimate grow best.

To encourage wildflower growth, the method we developed and that did work was running pigs to clear areas covered with bracken (and marginal areas of thicket that you want to make into meadow), machine raking or harrowing the pasture at least twice a year to remove embedded grass matting and break up the turf and, finally, hay making (not necessarily at any particular time of year). We have plenty of diversity, including sanfoin and other legumes.

Hay making is both crucial and the most precarious part of the operation because it is so difficult to find contractors with small baling machinery who are willing to make small holders' hay, combined with the weather window of opportunity. In 2021 we lost the entire quota of hay due to sustained rain just after baling. Yet when we are lucky with the contractors and the weather, the quality of the hay is almost unbeatable.



South Stoke

Bathscape writes:

We became involved with this field after it was bought by a new landowner with an interest in increasing biodiversity. It was part of a wider plot of land across which the owner had a local farmer graze his cattle to help manage them, however this field had not been grazed for some years due to inadequate fencing and as a result was deteriorating to rough grassland. We were able to provide some funding towards the fencing of the site in 2020 through our small grants scheme which then allowed the farmer to reinstate suitable grazing. A return to the site three years later showed that the scrubbing over of the grassland had ceased and the dominance of coarse grasses reduced allowing wildflowers to re-establish in greater numbers.

Pre-works visit with our Avon Wildlife Trust grassland advisor 22nd June 2020 (left) vs the effect of fencing and 2 years management including grazing by cattle (right)

22nd June 2020



8th June 2023





Bird's-foot trefoil and other wildflowers increasing in number in the more open sward June 2023

Sites which have been seeded with brush harvested seed

Many sites will have lost the wildflower seed in the seedbank as the lifespan of seed in the soil varies widely, from less than a year for plants such as Yellow rattle to up to 80 years for Dock! Unless they are adjacent to wildflower-rich sites these sites will typically need to have wildflowers added to them, usually through seeding, to diversify them as meadows.

In 2019 Bathscape purchased a brush harvester, a piece of machinery that can be drawn across a meadow by a quad bike or similar, to knock the seed heads off grasses and wildflowers into a hopper. This can then be emptied, sieved, and stored for using to seed new meadows later in the year.

Since that time the National Trust in Bath has overseen the collection of seed using the brush harvester annually from its wildflower-rich meadows and other private sites, with the help of Bathscape volunteers. The seed has then been spread at new sites in the autumn by volunteers with the help of the National Trust and Avon Wildlife Trust.

In order to diversify further, an option is to not only seed but also to add plug plants (ie small plants that have typically been grown from seed in celled plant trays). This can be an option for introducing a wider range of species as some wildflowers can struggle to establish if seeded directly into the ground amongst competing plants.



The seed harvesting process – brush harvester, hand sorting the seeds and then bagging them.

Innox Park, Twerton

Bathscape writes:

This north-facing sloping park was formerly close-mown amenity grass across its entirety. Two patches of wildflower rich grassland have been developed towards the top of the slope. The western area was sown by Bath & North East Somerset Council Parks Department in 2018 using a commercial seed mix (Emorsgate seed mix harvested from St Catherine's Valley) and subsequently had plug plants added, including some European varieties of wildflower to add extra colour.

The eastern area of the site was seeded in 2019 solely with brush harvested Bathscape seed with no subsequent additions. The 2019 ground preparation was a short mowing of the grass followed by scarifying just prior to seeding in September. Conditions were exceptionally dry that September with the earth baked hard so on the day of seeding there was some additional scuffing using rakes to try and create a little tilth.

Both areas have established well, with surveying in 2023 by Bath Natural History Society showing 35 species of grass and wildflower now present in the western section and 28 species in the eastern section. Invertebrate interest has also increased.



Western Area plug planting amongst seeded area in 2020 (left) and surveying the meadow in June 2023 (right)



Eastern Area July 2019 prior to works (left) and sowing in Sept 2019 (right)



Eastern area establishment in 20th May 2020 (left) and 7th June 2022 (right)

Weston

Helen writes:

We acquired our field in the winter of 2012/13. It is situated on the outskirts of Weston Village, Bath. The site slopes from northwest to southeast, approximately square and around 0.6 Hectares. It had previously been used for grazing horses.

For the first two summers it was cut about three times per year, with the arisings left in situ. Then we found a local farmer who used it for grazing sheep a few weeks each year and "topped" it annually. During this time we selectively killed the docks that appeared growing in the field, and removed ragwort when we found it.

In October 2019 we invited the Bathscape Grassland Advisor to visit the site and he put us in touch with a contractor to do a haycut in the summer of 2020. Unfortunately this didn't work out and our local farmer "topped" it for us.

In 2021, the farmer who had been "topping" the field and grazing his sheep offered to do a haycut for us. That first summer he cut five large bales. In the September, the sheep were brought in once the grass had regrown.

In 2022, after a further visit from Bathscape we were advised to "top" the Creeping thistles at the end of June, before they flowered and sow some Yellow rattle in the middle third of the field where the least grass was growing. We also spotted some orchids growing in the field. The haycut in July 2022 generated four and a bit bales. The sheep came again at the beginning of September for a couple of weeks and then in late September 2022 our local farmer chain harrowed the mid-section, when the ground was very dry, and sowed wildflower seed (predominantly Yellow rattle), given to us by the National Trust from Smallcombe Vale.

In April 2023 the Creeping thistle was strimmed. Cutting the thistle in June takes out a lot of good grass while in April it has time to grow back. The process seems to be working as the Creeping thistle in the field is much weaker than in our orchard.

So far this summer (June 2023) twenty different types of grass have been identified in the field and the orchids have re-appeared. There is an abundance of Yellow rattle in the sown mid-section of the field and it has dramatically reduced the grass cover there. The predominant grass species in this area of the field are Perennial rye and Crested dog's tail. We are hoping to get our next haycut in July.



June 2022 pre seeding



Mown prior to seeding



Chain harrowed Sep 2022



Yellow rattle establishment June 2023

Hedgemoor Park, Bath

Graham writes:

The wildflower meadow in Hedgemoor Park is a long strip measuring approximately 5m x 60m, located in the park's north-eastern section at its boundary with London Street/Margaret's Hill. Appropriately, there is a flagpole in the middle, flying the park's Green Flag Award pennant.

The area first came into existence as a place for wildflowers in April 2018 during a community planting day organised by Avon Wildlife Trust. In conjunction with the Parks Dept, AWT chose the site because it was a grassy area with little footfall but was visible from London Street and the park above. They brought plug plants and seed and, after roughly turning over the existing grass, the stock was dug in and sowed.

Regrettably the days and weeks after were particularly hot and dry and the community didn't return to water, so some of the planting failed.

The Friends of Hedgemoor Park formed in April 2019 and our gardening activities didn't get started until later that year. We were then interrupted by the pandemic.

By this time the Meadow had developed some character, but we're a little hazy on what Parks Dept's cutting regime had consisted of prior to this. Only late in 2020 did the Friends start to take an interest in the meadow and began to actively intervene, liaising with Parks on the timing of an Autumn cutting and collecting regime. Yellow rattle was sown before Winter set in and plugs of Harebell, Cowslip, Primrose were planted.

The Spring of 2021 saw signs of good-sized patches of Rattle appearing, which we hoped would suppress some of the abundance of tall grasses.

Bathscape's Dan Merrett visited the site in July 2021 and, later, the Friends joined the Bath Area Meadows Group. Flower species noted that Summer included: Field scabious, Knapweed, Oxeye daisy, Bird's-foot trefoil, Campion, Tufted vetch, Viper's bugloss, Wild carrot and Yarrow, all popular with great numbers of pollinators and other invertebrates. Overall, good progress but tall grasses needed working on.

The Spring of 2022 yielded some pleasing results, with a substantial expansion of Rattle coverage and much the same flowering species in evidence. However, the northern end of the meadow was being taken over by invasive annuals such as Spotted medick and Goosegrass. Late that year we agreed with Parks that they would try to maintain a cutting regime consisting of 1) 7cm Spring cut late Feb/early March, 2) 7cm Summer cut mid/end August, arisings to lie for 2-3 weeks, 3) 7cm Autumn cut in October (if possible).

In the Spring of 2023, the Friends were delighted to see large clusters of Cowslip emerging and greatly enlarged areas of Rattle. Less exciting was the re-emergence of invasive annuals and Cocksfoot grass. So, we asked Parks to strim the area and then began removing the Cocksfoot at its roots. This will now be resown with a chalk soil grass mix from Emorsgate along with Rattle and Cowslip seed harvested from other areas of the meadow.

The Friends' work continues



Royal Crescent, Bath

Bathscape writes:

Probably the most high-profile seeding that Bathscape has been involved with is the strip in front of the Royal Crescent haha which was done by Bath & North East Somerset Council Parks department using a mix of Bathscape-sourced Yellow rattle-rich brush harvested seed, commercial native meadow mix and a smattering of annual seed to give pops of red poppy and blue cornflower amongst the white Oxeye daisies. The seeding was done in October 2021 after the ground had been prepared by using a rotavator which created significant open ground for seeds to germinate in and 'greened up' over the winter as per the pictures below.



22nd October 2021



22nd December 2021



28th March 2022



June 2017, when nothing had been added but it had been allowed to grow long and the calcium-loving plant Lady's bedstraw lined the top of the Bath stone wall.



June 2022, nine months after seeding by the Council's parks department with patches of annual flowers of cornflower and poppy amongst establishing Oxeye daisy and Yellow rattle.



June 2023 the Lady's bedstraw still lines the top of the wall, while in the absence of further disturbance of the soil the annuals have mostly disappeared and the ox eye daisy has firmly taken hold.

Charmydown southern slopes

Rosie Maple, Wessex Water Conservation Access and Recreation Officer writes:

The restoration/recreation site encompassed 8 field compartments comprising roughly 15ha of scrub, grassland and woodland. 6 fields are joined in a central block and two are outliers. The outlying fields are both situated on mild slopes and though having once been grazed, since became unmanaged thatchy, generic and grass dominated though with some taller flowers still present such as Meadow vetchling, Wild angelica and Common knapweed.

The central block was once (30-50 years ago) a steeply sloping calcareous grassland escarpment divided up by old hedgerows. Cattle grazing has historically been carried out by a suckler herd of continental cross breeds however a clear preference for the more gently sloping valley bottom has led to dense thorn scrub (Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Bramble and Bracken on the areas) encroaching over the steeper sloping escarpment, leaving only small, threatened pockets of calcareous grassland remaining.

These remaining pockets contained many positive indicators including Upright brome, Meadow oat grass, Wild thyme, Rock rose, Small scabious, and one individual plant of Clustered bell-flower found in 2021. Bracken encroachment has historically been a significant barrier to grassland restoration with aerial photos suggesting 6ha of grassland lost to scrub in the last 30 / 40 years.



Whole site 1989 (left) and 2020 (right)

In autumn 2022 the grass dominated areas of the outlying fields were close cut and the arisings collected. The areas were then scarified to 100% bare ground and seed broadcast and rolled in using a tractor. In spring 2023 the fields showed vigorous and lush grass growth with sward structure greatly improved, but clearly it will take several years to reduce the vigour through meadow management.

No official survey was carried out over year 1 spring and summer, but a rapid walkover identified: numerous patches of Yellow rattle, dominant where it occurs (grass sward suitably shorter in these locations), Sweet vernal grass and Meadow foxtail in abundance, no major reduction in Cocksfoot or Yorkshire fog identified at this stage, Perennial flax in flower - undesirable imposter into the seed mix, no obvious take up of perennial wildflowers named in the seed mix (expected at this stage) A second cut and collect has been completed as of September 2023. Aftermath grazing to follow this Autumn and Winter.



Winter 2020 showing the matted thatch state of the grassland – mainly False oat grass, Cocksfoot and Yorkshire fog



October 2022, 2 weeks after scarification and seeding



May 2023

The central block consists of organic and non-organic fields. For the organic fields the decision was made to avoid re-seeding those areas where grassland pockets remained (around 30% of the area) and instead re-seed only on bare ground where scrub has been removed (around 70% of the area). Contractors removed woody scrub including the rootballs using digger mounted grabs. This produced large areas of 100% bare ground. The ground was then tilled up where accessible with a tractor mounted chain harrow. Emorsgate EM18 St Catherine's Valley mix was broadcast over all areas of bare ground, harvested from Charmy Down airfield (donor site <2km distance from recipient site).

Given the dominance and stage of development of the scrub that was removed from the slope in 2021, the uptake of meadow mix and lack of scrub regrowth in the spring of 2023 was remarkable. Removal of the root balls was obviously highly worthwhile and successful means of preventing regrowth.

The species mix and uptake was very similar to outlying fields described above, with lots of Yellow rattle an encouraging sign, but no obvious seedlings of perennial wildflowers apparent at this stage but that is to be expected. Meadow foxtail, Sweet vernal grass and Yorkshire fog were the dominant grass species (in May). The weed burden included lots of cleavers and hemlock, while some of the wetter areas of the site were dominated by weeds such as Creeping thistle and Common hogweed in spring. A significant flush of Common hemlock was present scattered across the area but concentrated at the base of slopes. A cut and collect of flowering hemlock was carried out in June 2023, and cattle grazing on rotation at roughly 2 livestock units per ha is to commence.



Central block, organic area (root balls removed): top left November 2020 before works, top right October 2022 post scrub clearance [Note wet flush in field centre, supporting a wealth of young hemlock plants], bottom left May 2023, bottom right late July 2023 following hemlock cut & collect and rotational grazing.

The non-organic fields had scrub cleared using tractor mounted flails, and digger mounted tree shears. Stump treatment was applied using glyphosate on woody shrubs marked for removal. No wildflower seed was sown on these fields in 2021, as areas of high-quality habitat were still present and it was felt the seed bank could still have retained species of interest. Cattle troughs and fencing were installed to allow the old field system to be grazed in rotation, with, where possible, troughs located at the top of slopes to encourage cattle up and down the site.

Results at the non-organic fields have so far been disappointing. Lack of re-seeding and the prevalence of underground bramble rhizomes and thorn roots resulted in poor regeneration of grasses and forbs in the seed bank. A significant flush of non-flowering and flowering common hemlock further scuppered plans to mob graze off the bramble and thorn regrowth. Partial exclusion of cattle and 2 x spot treatments of the hemlock was carried out in 2023, with repeat scrub cutting works required in September 2023. More EM18 seed mix has been purchased and will be broadcast with volunteers this Autumn.

At the time of writing the original scrub removal specification, no one expected the removal of rootballs to be an easy method of clearance compared to more traditional cut and stump treat method. In hindsight, removal of all woody scrub via rootballs (in organic and non-organic areas) would have been a more economical method of removal due to the loose and friable nature of the soil. A scrub cut and collect (including the bracken litter) has since taken place and re-seeding into any areas of bare ground will commence in Autumn 2023.



Central block, non-organic parcel: winter 2020, pre-works



January 2023 Following bramble and thorn cut and collect. No re-seeding (mistake!)



May 2023: Still lots of bare ground in the north of the field compartment that has allowed the bracken to take hold once more.

The whole site is now under rotational cattle grazing regime, using 1 and 2 year old store cattle – Angus and Hereford continental crosses. Not ideal stock type for the site, but they are small animals and have shown willing to move up across the slopes which is encouraging. Restorative management stocking density of >2 livestock units per ha and moved on a rotation – using sward height as a metric for when cattle need moving on and off. Once scrub regrowth is under control, a lower stocking rate (roughly 0.7 LU per ha) will be employed.

Laying Wildflower Turf

The quickest (and most expensive) way to create a meadow is probably through laying wildflower turf. Two local examples are:

Combe Down

Bathscape writes:

At this garden site, following patio works in early 2021 the owners decided to create a small meadow on an area of re-landscaped slope. They opted for wildflower turf for immediate effect, however through a misunderstanding, rich topsoil was brought in to build up the top of the slope rather than using subsoil. The result is a meadow that reverses the usual characteristic of a sloping meadow. Typically the steeper upper reaches of sloping sites are the most nutrient poor (as nutrients over time wash down slope through the soil) and it is in nutrient poor soils that wildflowers are best able to compete against the stronger growing grasses. At this site however the because the top of the slope was built up with rich topsoil the wildflowers were more successful in the lower reaches and struggled to compete higher up where the grasses dominated (though Oxeye daisy managed to hold its own).



12th June 2021, looking up from the bottom of the slope (left), and looking down from the top (right)

By summer 2023 the difference was less marked though still visible, while across the whole slope the numbers of wildflowers had increased.



28th May 2023 – Oxeye daisy with Ragged robin plus Yellow rattle frequent on the lower slope



16th June 2023

As a footnote in the same year as they laid the wildflower turf the owners decided to allow some of the existing lawn to grow through no-mow May (and into June) and were rewarded with Pyramidal orchids appearing among the Fox and cubs plants. The orchids have since reappeared each year.



12th June 2021

Snow Hill

Bathscape writes:

Here wildflower turf was laid in a communal wild area by the housing association. The date of laying is unknown, though presumed to be around 2020, and the establishment was quick and good with Oxeye daisy dominant, together with colourful species such as Red campion. There was no grass in the mix, however other 'weed' species such as Smooth sow thistle and Bristly oxtongue were present by 2021.



June 2021

By 2023 it appeared that there had been no annual management of the site for a couple of years as Bramble and other coarse plants were taking hold and swamping the wildflowers.



15th June 2023

Looking further

As many of the restorations in this document, especially those that have been seeded, are fairly recent and therefore in the early stages of establishment, here are a couple of local examples from outside the Bathscape area that were seeded 8 or 9 years ago to give a sense of what can be expected over a longer time frame. They were seeded as part of the national Coronation Meadows Project, a partnership between the charities Plantlife, The Wildlife Trusts and the Rare Breeds Survival Trust that was initiated by the then Prince of Wales to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation.

Folly Farm, Avon

Bathscape writes:

This field at Avon Wildlife Trust's Folly Farm reserve was seeded in late summer 2015 by the Trust using green hay from a historically wildflower-rich meadow located elsewhere on the reserve. Green hay is a method of seed transfer whereby you cut a donor meadow and then transport and spread the hay on a recipient within the hour to avoid the hay heating up and affecting the viability of the seed.

Despite concerns at the time of the ground preparation at the recipient meadow being a little light regarding the amount of bare ground created, a return visit in June 2023 showed the seeded meadow to now be similar in appearance to the donor meadow with Meadow buttercup, Yellow rattle, Common spotted orchid and Bird's-foot trefoil prominent (n.b. the tall Marsh thistle evident in the recipient meadow photo below was pre-existing, though likely increased by the fact that it was allowed to seed into the prepared ground) .



The donor meadow



The recipient meadow in August 2015 with green hay spread (left) and in June 2023 (right)

Middledown, Somerset

Bathscape writes:

This field near Cheddar was seeded by Somerset Wildlife Trust in 2014 using brush harvested seed collected from a historic meadow at their Chancellors Farm reserve. The ground was prepared by power harrowing, however at the time of the works the farmer had yet to collect his rowed-up hay so the harrowing and seeding was restricted to strips. It's thereby an accidental example of focussing seeding in a specific area and how wildflowers then spread across a field over time.



Power harrowing and seeding late summer 2014



June 2015 the left hand strip having been harrowed and seeded, with the right hand strip untouched.



June 2023 with the strips now indistinguishable



A close up on the sward (June 2023) with Bird's-foot trefoil, Cat's ear, Yellow rattle, Meadow buttercup, Red clover, Common spotted orchid, Common knapweed, Common sorrel, Sweet vernal grass and Crested dog's-tail present.

A final thought

The intention of this document was to collate some of the learning and experiences of people who have developed meadows in the Bath area and hopefully inspire others to follow their example. The sites have been deliberately selected to show a range of interventions, from simply changing management and letting nature take its course over a number of years, to the instant creation of a wildflower area through the laying of wildflower-rich turf. There is no right or wrong method and any move from a monoculture of amenity grass to a varied sward of grasses and wildflowers is to be applauded.

In the selection of what is an appropriate intervention at a site, however, there is an argument for favouring the site diversifying naturally through management where that is achievable. From this there is a sliding scale: introducing perhaps just Yellow rattle seed to help kick start things; introducing only appropriate locally harvested seed; introducing only native seed from a specialist supplier; all the way to incorporating garden varieties if the setting is a garden.

All of these choices are good, even if the further we move along the scale the more we may lose the integrity of the site, but it is best practice in wilder sites to start at the lower intervention end of the scale before stepping up if necessary. There is no wrong or right, in our urban amenity sites areas of long grass can attract complaints rather than support if they aren't awash with wildflowers and colour, and our insects care only that the wildflowers are those that they are adapted to feed from.

A huge thanks to all those meadow makers who shared their experiences. For further information on creating and managing meadows the Magnificent Meadows website is a good starting point <http://www.magnificentmeadows.org.uk/advice-guidance> or contact info@bathscape.co.uk to find out more about our work or to arrange a visit from the Grassland Advisory service.

Bathscape scheme partners are:

