

Birth of a Wildflower Meadow in Cooper's Field

We thought it would be rather nice to create a wild flower meadow on the hill and in the New Year of 2012 started to consider the feasibility of such a project. Having read up on the subject, it became clear that it was not just a matter of scattering some seeds and waiting for a beautiful meadow to emerge! We contacted Jon Burgess at the Woodland Trust to get his agreement so that we could proceed with this project.

We contacted Nick Gray from the Dorset Wildlife Trust and he was a mine of information on the subject which we couldn't have done without. He advised us about the use of yellow rattle seed which would help suppress the grass in the meadow so that the wildflowers would have space to grow.

On 02.04.12 Nick very kindly collected half a kilo of yellow rattle seed from a field near Whitchurch Canonorum.

We then met with Nick on 24.08.12 to decide on a suitable site and to gain some very useful information about how to proceed. We selected an area to the left of the seats at the top of Cooper's field as the grass growing in this area was deemed suitable. The grass would need to be cut quite a few times to expose as much soil as possible before the yellow rattle seeds could be sown.

Paul carried out the first cut on 26.08.12 and then on 28.08.12 a group of the volunteers raked up the grass. Paul then did a shorter cut on the same day, and we raked it up again!

Paul did a further cut on 30.08.12 and then a couple of us measured the area, so that we knew how much seed we would need.

Grass raked up again on 31.08.12. It was a really good job that Cathy had the foresight to order two large old-fashioned rakes as we would have been there forever raking with our garden rakes!

We e-mailed Nick with the measurement of the area. He felt we would need more seed and he kindly agreed to purchase another half kilo for us as he was ordering some for another project he was involved in. We also e-mailed Jon Burgess with a map of the position of the meadow, so that the contractors would not mow that area next summer.

On 01.09.12 Nick visited the site to see if we had cleared enough of the area ready for sowing. It was fine except for a few patches of really thick grass roots and we agreed a sowing date of 09.09.12.

Paul mowed the area yet again on 06.09.12 and because the grass was so dry managed to set his mower on fire, but managed to put it out without damage to the mower!

There was a further raking session and aerating of the grass roots on 07.09.12.

On 09.09.12 the great day had finally arrived to sow the yellow rattle seed. We were very lucky that the weather held and what fun was had by all. Nick was there to show us what to do. Four children were in the group of volunteers and Nick explained all about yellow rattle seed and why we were sowing it. The seed was measured out and mixed with the sand

that Adam had kindly provided. Each child was given a carton of seed / sand and was shown how and where to sow it, as well as the adults. Within an hour the seed was sown and then we had to tread it in. The children came up with an ingenious idea of rolling down the hill to bed it in. What fun they had. Cathy took some great photos of the activity.

The area will now be left for the seed to germinate – hopefully we will get some rain before long.

P.S. It rained the same night!

In February/March just as the seeds start growing, the area will need to be cut again – well done Paul.

In the summer when the yellow rattle has grown and has set new seed, we will be able to collect this and use elsewhere.

In the Autumn we will then be able to sow the wildflower seeds that have been collected and with a bit of luck the following spring/summer we will have the start of a wonderful wild flower meadow and it will have been worth all the hard work everyone had put in.

Special thanks to Nick Gray, his advice and help was invaluable. Also, a huge big thanks to Paul Bowditch as the project would not have got off the ground without the use of his mower.