

Recording Wildflowers in Shamley Green - Can You Help?

'Where flowers bloom so does hope'. Lady Bird Johnson

Many villagers walk around the commons and open land in Shamley Green regularly, perhaps even more than before in these Covid times. Many native plants in UK have become scarce or lost in recent years for a variety of reasons, and all over the country moves are afoot to try to reverse this. The Shamley Green Environment Group thought it would be a good idea to create a record of what wildflowers we already have to indicate how we can move forward and try to increase biodiversity for future generations. You don't need any expert knowledge to help!

Staggeringly, over 97% of British meadows have been eradicated since the 1930s. As a result, many iconic wildflowers such as ragged robin, harebell and wild orchids are threatened. Dr Trevor Dines of Plantlife said: "The steady, quiet and under-reported decline of our meadows is one of the biggest tragedies in the history of UK nature conservation."

Over 1,400 insect species rely on wildflower meadows for survival. They help to maintain a healthy ecosystem with hedgehogs, birds and bats eating the insects that breed there. There is no doubt that the collapse of biodiversity on our open land has contributed massively to the downward spiral of butterflies, bees and insectivorous birds seen in the past few decades.

A few months ago we asked if longtime residents could remember wild plants which used to bloom in the village but are no longer widespread, or have disappeared. And all those who responded lamented the loss of biodiversity and habitat, and said they'd love to see more wildflowers on our verges and common land again.

In common with most councils around the country our parish is experimenting with less mowing of common land in future. Excessive mowing in our lifetime has played a big part in the decline of the natural environment under our watch, as explained eloquently by TV gardener Monty Don in recent months. Less mowing means that species which have not had a chance to reproduce in recent years will be given a chance and may reappear in time. But this could take some years, and the kind of iconic meadows which can be seen on chalk land will not suddenly appear here as our conditions are very different. In the immediate vicinity of Shamley Green the soil is mostly acidic and sandy.

In Shamley Green, apart from mowing changes, the environment group is hoping to give nature a helping hand later in the year by planting wildflower seed, plugs or turf in a few trial areas. The selection of plants to suit our conditions will be based on professional advice.

In the meantime we thought it would be a good idea to try to make a basic record of existing wild flowers in the village through the year, both on common land and other public areas. Few of us have expert knowledge but with modern technology (there are many plant ID apps), not to mention reference books, they can usually easily be identified by anyone. We ask that if people on their walks look for flowers on commons or verges and try to record the name (if they know or can find out), the location, and the date. It would be helpful to take a photograph to aid later identification. Both our schools are already doing a lot on environmental issues and are involved in this project.

The observations and photos (jpeg file for photos please) could be sent to Glynis or Alison. And members of the Shamley Green Environment Group will put them on the forthcoming village environment website (watch this space) and eventually on a map. This would produce a record of what we already have to help guide us in safeguarding nature for future generations. Please do what you can to help.

Thank you

Glynis Drummond (glynisdrummond@me.com)

Alison Harding

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