



THE *Living* Churchyard PROJECT

A guide to some common and important plant species



PATRON: THE BISHOP OF SHERBORNE

Common Indicators of potentially high interest (unimproved) grassland

Tall grassland



Knapweed

Thistlelike heads are a great pollen and nectar source for invertebrates and seed heads great for birds.

Hairy lance-shaped leaves are often slightly lobed and form a basal rosette. Often dullish dark green with purple-tinged edge.

Key ID feature - difference from Devil's-bit Scabious when not in flower is alternate leaves.



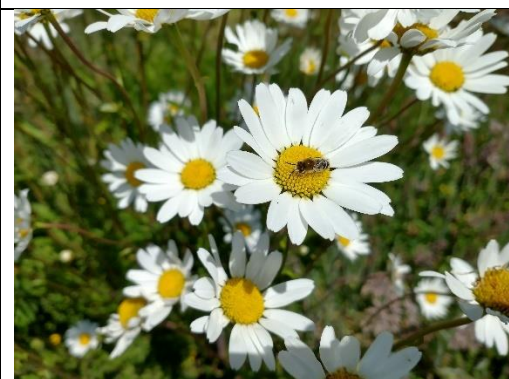
Devil's-bit scabious

Late flowering nectar source towards the end of the summer for pollinators.

The hairy lance-shaped leaves are usually not lobed and a bright green with pale mid-vein.

Late cutting is recommended when this is present to ensure the flowers are allowed to bloom.

Key ID feature - difference from Common Knapweed when not in flower is opposite leaves.



Ox-eye Daisy

Great for bumblebees, moths and hoverflies especially with the open flat flowers ideal for short-tongued insects

Key ID feature – spoon-shaped basal leaves have shallow lobed. Look out for lobed leaves in short cut turf.



Field Scabious

Wide heads with clusters of pale lilac flowers a favourite of bees and hoverflies.

The young rosette leaves can look very similar to Knapweed or Devil's-bit Scabious but as the plant develops, upper leaves will be more and more divided into deep lobes.

Key ID feature - Looks similar to Small Scabious but the individual flowers are 4-lobed rather than 5-lobed.



Meadow Vetchling

A good grassland indicator found in a range of grassland types.

It is a scrambling plant with yellow pea-like flowers and paired leaflets with a tendril which it uses to climb other plants.

Key ID feature – the pair of arrowhead shaped stipules where the leaves join the stem.

Photo © Dave Verrall



Yellow Rattle

A hemi-parasitic typical hay meadow species which weakens grasses and allows wildflowers to establish and be maintained.

Yellow flowers protrude from an inflated pale green calyx and these form a seed pod which rattles with winged seed when ripe.

Key ID feature - Young plants have opposite pairs of narrow serrated leaves with adjacent pairs often at right angles to the previous pair forming distinctive upright shoots in grassland.

Short to medium length grassland



Rough Hawkbit

A yellow dandelion-like flower great for pollinators and develop similar fluffy seedheads which provide a food resource for birds especially finches.

When not flowering, the basal rosettes form quite dense clumps with lobed and very hairy leaves.

Key ID feature - the hairs on the leaves have a forked Y-shaped tip – you will need a hand lens to see this!



Hoary Plantain

Spike of tiny purple flowers with long purple anthers, typical of calcareous grassland habitats.

When not in flower, this can be spotted by its tight flattened rosette of egg-shaped basal leaves with a covering of fine hair.



Common Bird's-foot Trefoil

The yellow/orange flowers are great for pollinators. An important food plant for a range of butterfly species, especially Common Blue. The name refers to the clusters of seed pods after the flowers have finished which are roughly in the shape of a bird's foot.

The leaves are slightly waxy looking and blue-green with five leaflets. Very similar to Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil which is generally found in damper areas and is generally more robust and hairier.



Eyebrights

Tiny hemi-parasitic plants with white, yellow and purple flowers. There are many different species which are difficult to identify but all are good indicators of unimproved grassland.



Cowslip

Great early flowering nectar source for bees and butterflies. A foodplant for Duke of Burgundy butterfly and indicator of good quality calcareous grassland.

Deep yellow flowers with pale green calyx tube and rosette of wrinkled basal leaves.

Key ID feature – compared with False Oxslips or garden primulas, the flower heads all nod in one direction and flowers are smaller



Common Dog-violet

An early flowering nectar source for bumblebees and foodplant for fritillary butterflies. Found in all kinds of grassland

Purple flowers with deeper purple veins on the lower petal. The leaves are glossy green and heart-shaped.

Key ID features – the purple flowers have a spur which is paler than the petals (compared with Early Dog-violet) and the sepals are narrow and pointed (compared with Sweet Violet which has rounded sepals)



Tormentil

Food plant for a number of moth species and a nectar source for hoverflies in particular.

The yellow buttercup like flowers have four petals and the leaves are glossy and sharply toothed with three lobes.

Key ID feature – A pair of toothed stipules at the base of the stem leaves.



Lady's Bedstraw

Indicator of species rich grassland and foodplant for a number of moth species and bloody-nosed beetles.

It can be rambling in longer grass or form a short turf where grazed or mown with masses of tiny yellow flowers.

Key ID feature - The leaves are shiny, dark green and narrow, and grow in whorls of 8-12 around the stem.



Mouse-ear Hawkweed

A bright lemon yellow dandelion-like flower great for pollinators and found in short turf on well drained soils, sometimes in cracks in stonework.

The spoon-shaped leaves grow in a flattened rosette with a single flowering stem which arises from the centre.

Key ID feature - Leaves are green on top with sparse long white hairs and the underside has a pale white felted appearance

Non-plant indicators



Springy Turf-moss

An indicator of lower nutrient grasslands. Found among fine-leaved grasses and helps create quite an open sward suitable for flowering plants to set seed. Also associated with waxcap fungi.

The tiny pointed leaves bend away from the stem to give a star-like appearance. The stems are reddish.



Spindle, club, coral and waxcap fungi

Often bright colourful fungi which are indicators of long-standing unimproved grassland with good soil structure and underground networks of plant roots and fungal hyphae.

Waxcaps and other grassland fungi are favoured by a short turf and open sward which allows them to fruit.



Ant hills

Made by Yellow Meadow Ants over many years they are indicators of long-standing unimproved grassland which has high value for wildlife.

A great food supply for Green Woodpeckers too!

Photo © Guy Edwardes/2020VISION

Other common churchyard plants with high wildlife value



Selfheal

Low growing flower in short turf which is great for pollinators. After flowering papery seed heads are often left.

To identify when not in flower look for the hairy egg-shaped leaves with a creeping habit.

Key ID feature - two pairs of reddish raised lines on the stems.



Primrose

An early flowering favourite of early spring solitary bees, butterflies and bee-flies.

Pale buttery yellow five-petaled flowers arising on stems from the centre of a rosette of wrinkled leaves.

Look out for hybrids and cultivars which are common in churchyards. Generally only pale yellow primroses are considered native while other colour forms may be hybrids or garden varieties.



Meadow Buttercup

A nice grassland flower found in a range of grassland types.

Key ID feature - Meadow buttercups have deeply divided basal leaves with veins radiating from the base of the leaf (palmate).

Look out for Creeping Buttercup which is more common and has basal leaves with three lobes, the final lobe being on a short stalk and Bulbous Buttercup (also a nice species!) which has leaves like Creeping Buttercup and down-turned sepals beneath the petals.



Yarrow

Grows in short and medium length grassland and can flower late into the autumn. A great nectar source for all kinds of insects and the leaves are the foodplant for a range of moth species.

Flowers are white or can be pinkish in a wide head, each individual 'flower' is actually a mass of tiny flowers surrounded by larger 'petals'

Key ID feature – the very fine feathery leaves



Sorrel

The leaves are the foodplant for Small Copper butterfly and it is a good indicator of species rich grassland.

Bright green hairless leaves, sometimes turn reddish in dry or sunny locations. The leaves are a rounded arrow shape with backwards pointing lobes.

A tall spike of reddish flowers is followed by papery winged 'nuts'



Ground Ivy

Early flowering with deep blue-purple tubular flowers in small whorls. Great for early spring solitary bees and long-tongued bumblebees and bee-flies.

The leaves are kidney-shaped, lobed and hairy, similar to dead-nettles and on long stems. In sunny areas, the leaves can be purplish.

Key ID feature - very aromatic with a minty, blackcurrant-like scent.



Garlic Mustard

An important food plant for Orange-tip butterflies (look out for the bright orange eggs near the flowers) and a great spring nectar plant for pollinators.

The shiny green heart-shaped leaves have a scalloped edge and clusters of small white flowers grow at the tip of the stem. The flowers are followed by long thin seed-pods.

Key ID feature – the leaves have an oniony or garlicky smell when crushed.



Common Cat's-ear

A dandelion-like flower which is a great nectar plant for all kinds of pollinators and a nice indicator of diverse grassland.

This can look very similar to Rough Hawkbit but the flowering stems are branched with multiple flowerheads and 'Cat's-ear' bracts.

Like Rough Hawkbit, the basal leaves grow in a rosette and are very roughly hairy but they do not have forked hairs.



Ribwort Plantain

The seed heads are great for birds in winter and the plant is thought to form associations with several species of waxcap fungi. A good indicator of herb-rich grasslands.

Long lance-shaped leaves with very prominent veins forming ribs down the length of the leaf. The flowers form a tight head at the top of a tall stem which have pale yellow anthers.



Crane's-bills

A whole range of species which are great for pollinators.

Most have pink or purple flowers (sometimes white) with five petals and species differ in how deeply notched the petals are.

Leaves are usually lobed to a greater or lesser extent and palmately veined.

Examples include Herb-Robert (left), Cut-leaved Cranesbill, Dove's-foot Cranesbill, Hedgerow Cranesbill and Meadow Cranesbill.



Crocuses

Non-native but commonly planted and a great early season pollen and nectar source for early emerging bumblebees in particular.

Narrow strap-like leaves and large petalled flowers with orange anthers. They are found in a range of colours but most commonly purple, yellow and white.



Speedwells

A whole range of species which mostly have small blue/white flowers frequently used by tiny solitary bees. Field speedwell in particular can be found in flower most of the year.

Examples include Germander Speedwell (left) with larger bright blue flowers and two lines of hairs down the stem.

Common Field Speedwell which usually has paler flowers with the lower petal whiter than the rest.

Thyme-leaved Speedwell with pale white/blue flowers on a spike with smooth-edged leaves.



Red and white dead nettles

Brilliant early season nectar source for long-tongued bumblebees in particular.

Softly hairy nettle-like leaves and no sting!

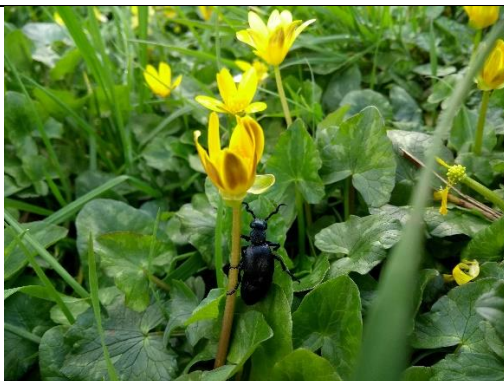
Red-dead nettles have pink/purple flowers while White Dead Nettle has larger white flowers which grow in whorls near the top of the flowering stem.



Green alkanet

Can be a thug (so don't recommend introducing) but loved by pollinators of all kinds if already present and great in shady corners. The leaves are a common food plant for the colourful Scarlet Tiger moth.

Large softly hairy oval leaves, sometimes with paler white spotting. Flowers are small, bright blue with five petals and a white ring in the centre.



Lesser celandine

A shade-loving early spring flower which is great for pollinators of all kinds and a favourite foodplant for Black and Violet Oil Beetles.

The flowers have 7-12 shiny bright yellow petals and open in the sun and close up in dull or wet weather.

The leaves are shiny, fleshy and heart-shaped with a wavy margin. It spreads rapidly with tuberous roots.



Bugle

A great nectar source for a range of pollinators including butterflies, bees and hoverflies.

Deep blue flowers grown in tight whorls around the stem, alternating with shiny whorls of leaves. The plant is sprawling and spreads by runners.

Lower leaves are shiny and tongue-shaped with scalloped edges.



Bluebell

Native bluebells are scented and have pale cream pollen and anthers. Bells are deep blue and narrow and droop down towards one side. Good early nectar source for bumblebees.

Look out for the common hybrid Bluebell which is common in gardens and close to habitation. These have wider leaves and are generally more robust plants with flowers ranging from pink and white to pale purple. Flowers are more open, upright and face all around the stem. Anthers may have a blueish tinge. Just as good as native bluebells for pollinators!

Often overlooked plants and their wildlife value



Nettle

Foodplant for Red Admiral, Comma, Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock butterflies and beetles like the Green Nettle Weevil. Also a favourite of aphids which feed birds and predatory insects and the seeds are a food source for seed eating birds such as finches.

Nettles are abundant across the countryside however so no need to maintain a nettle corner if you don't want to!



Bramble

Bramble blossom is a great source of nectar and pollen for bees, hoverflies, butterflies and beetles in the summer. They also provide a safe and favoured nesting spot for birds including wrens and long-tailed tits. The fruits and seeds are great for birds and mammals in the autumn. Cut stems also make ideal nesting habitat for some species of tiny solitary bees and the leaves and stems feed a range of moth and other insect species.



Blackthorn

A favourite spring blossom which attracts a huge range of pollinating insects, particularly bees and hoverflies. Small areas of scrub can provide shelter and safety for nesting birds and the fruit and seeds again are ideal for birds and mammals in the winter.



Dandelion

One of the most productive nectar producing flowers and the open composite flowers make them ideal for all kinds of pollinating insects. Flowers open in the sun and plants flower well in short grassed areas if not cut too frequently.



Coarser grasses

E.g. Cock's Foot, Timothy, Meadow Foxtail are used by a range of butterflies such as the skippers and Marbled White. Hollow dead stems used for nesting by tiny solitary bees and overwintering insects. Large tussocks of coarse grasses are vital nesting habitat for harvest mice.

Leaving a margin of grass dominated areas to grow long can provide these additional resources and habitats for wildlife.

Photo © Richard Burkmar



Ivy

A really important late season nectar source for insects, especially butterfly species that overwinter as adults and the Ivy Bee whose lifecycle is adapted to make use of this resource.

Berries provide a feast for birds through the winter and again evergreen ivy cover on walls makes great nesting sites for early nesting robins, wrens and dunnocks.



Holly

Food plant for Holly Blue butterflies in spring, when eggs are laid near flower buds. The flowers are great for flies and other pollinators and red berries provide a food resource for birds in winter.

Dense evergreen foliage provides safe shelter and protection for a range of animals and birds all year round.



Thistles

The food-plant for Painted Lady butterflies and all sorts of other invertebrates such as Tortoise beetles.

Flowers provide lots of nectar, and are great for pollinators while seeds are a favourite of birds such as Goldfinch.

On calcareous soils, some species can be indicators of high value grassland habitats i.e. Dwarf Thistle & Woolly Thistle.