

The Green Linnet

The Newsletter for owners of Sites of Nature Conservation Interest



Issue 20 : December 2015

Hoary plantain



Field scabious



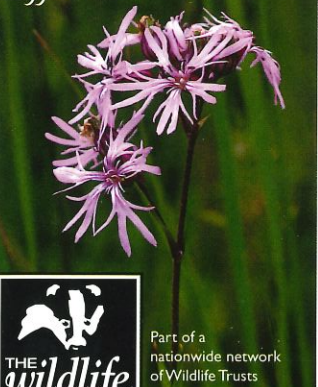
Harebell



Common rock rose



Ragged robin



Fading Flowers

We are fortunate in Dorset that our SNCIs cover a rich variety of wildlife habitats including heathland, fens, chalk downland, acid grasslands, meadows and ancient woodland to name but a few. Indeed the square kilometre south of Wareham is said to be the most diverse in England. It is not surprising then that the county supports a wonderful variety of plants. Unfortunately however, there are dark clouds gathering on this splendid horizon.

A report published in 2014 by 6 leading botanical organisations explored the status of England's plants and unveiled some sobering facts. It seems a fifth of England's wildflower species are under threat, particularly those associated with infertile soils and open habitats, most having undergone a 30% decline. Furthermore, a suite of flowers that might be perceived as being fairly common and widespread are now approaching threatened status because of their sharp decline. Look out in your grasslands for Tormentil, Devil's-bit Scabious, Harebell, Field Scabious, Quaking Grass and, restricted to the chalk, Hoary Plantain and Rock Rose, and in your wet areas for Marsh Pennywort, Marsh Speedwell, Ragged Robin, Common Valerian and Marsh Valerian. If you are lucky enough to have these plants or even better a whole suite of them then please treasure them as they are in trouble.

Dorset's 1278 SNCIs are immensely important havens for these flowers which often occur together in such rich and colourful profusion that they attract a multitude of insects including rare grasshoppers, bees and butterflies. Across England Local Wildlife Sites (the national term for our SNCIs) cover at least 5% of the country, outnumber statutory sites by 10:1 and support 80% of threatened plants, all priority butterfly species and significant areas of England's most important habitats.

Unfortunately, Dorset is no exception to the national trend that sees a continuing loss of SNCIs – with 11% reported lost or damaged in England between 2009 and 2013 - sometimes as a result of development, agricultural improvement or tree planting but often merely through neglect. These sites often prove difficult to graze or cut or are simply not productive enough to be worth the effort, leading to the wild flowers being replaced by coarse grasses, scrub, bracken and other vigorous species. This situation has been exacerbated through changes in agri-environment schemes that in many cases will no longer provide sufficient support for managing these sites.

The Wildlife Trusts as an organisation is looking to lobby local authorities and developers to fully recognise the importance of local wildlife sites in planning and decision making processes, and the government to put more resources and effort into conserving, restoring, enhancing and linking up sites at a landscape scale to prevent their becoming isolated pockets of interest.¹ Here, in Dorset, we launched a Wildflower appeal seeking project funding to help us identify key areas for these 'near threatened' plants, promote an understanding of their importance and lend owners a helping hand with restoring and managing their sites to ensure their continued survival.

www.dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk/Dorset-wildflower-appeal

¹ Secret Spaces – The status of Local Wildlife Sites 2014 & why these special places need saving
www.wildlifetrusts.org/localwildlifesites

Mandy Marler
SNCI Officer



Part of a
nationwide network
of Wildlife Trusts

Countryside Stewardship



The Marshwood Vale



Eggardon landscape

New Scheme - how to make it work for you

As many of you are no-doubt well aware, Natural England's Environmental Stewardship Scheme has been re- (re!) branded 'Countryside Stewardship' and is up and running. Gone are the old Entry and Higher Level Stewardship (ELS and HLS), but rest assured much of the legacy of these 'Classic Schemes' is retained in the new Countryside Stewardship (CS) options and capital items. We should celebrate this Stewardship legacy which has offered landowners (agri)cultural and financial incentives and support to maintain and restore substantial areas of wildlife-rich habitat over the years. HLS especially came with worthwhile inducements to cherish biodiverse habitat, but even ELS offered many previously ineligible farmers the opportunity to try out a stewardship scheme, and although they were by no means perfect, we can be thankful for the existence of this statutory backing for our wildlife.

Where CS differs from ELS in particular is the fact that it is a competitive scheme – not all applicants will be offered an agreement. The more elements of the published "Statements of Priorities" that you can address - e.g. Biodiversity, Water, Historic Environment – the better your chances of getting in. You can increase your competitive advantage by fulfilling the Farm Wildlife and Wild Pollinator Package, a suite of options for farmland birds and the creation of pollen and nectar-rich habitat amongst other things, or by being part of a group under the all-new Facilitation Fund. The latter, worthily, is designed to increase the impact of CS on the landscape scale by bringing together individual farmers with more-or-less contiguous holdings to form groups whose influence extends over a much larger area and who can work together on pressing local issues like river restoration or connecting fragments of species-rich grassland. If you're interested in the Facilitation Fund, please give us a call to find out what's happening in Dorset.

While many of the more effective ELS/HLS options have been retained, unfortunately some of the payment rates have not, especially for grassland farmers. Budgets have been undeniably slashed, and some of you, disappointingly, won't now have the opportunity to engage with Natural England in species-rich habitat management. There is a £1000 per annum minimum grant which disadvantages those with small holdings. Even if the majority of your land can be entered into, for example, a species-rich grassland management option, a farm of 10 hectares (c. 25 acres) will need other options to reach the £1000 threshold. If you're an all-grass holding it will be even harder, with less frequent hedgerow cutting (and its attendant management implications) your other main points-scorer. Also Higher Tier, where you'll find the most targeted and higher-paying options, is largely invitation-only. However, **don't hesitate to get in touch if you'd like to know more and submit an Expression of Interest for Higher Tier CS** on your SSSI hay meadows, perhaps, or lovely patch of flower rich downland.

The new Countryside Stewardship Scheme is in its infancy and you may well have heard stories about its eccentricities and foibles, but we are working with Natural England and fellow conservation officers and agents to make it work for farmers and landowners in Dorset. **Please do give us a ring or drop us a line if you would like to discuss CS on your holding** or just hear more about the 'new' stewardship scheme in our beautiful and biodiverse corner of the land.

Nick Gray and Emily Newton:
01300 321329
ngray / enewton@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk



Can You Help Find Dorset's Remaining Veteran Trees?

Over several years DWT has been collecting records of Dorset's veteran trees as part of the Greenwood Tree Project. These magnificent trees are of cultural and historical significance having overseen hundreds of years of changes in our landscape. Veterans are also of high importance to wildlife. Mapping where they are in the county is an important first step to ensure their future as valuable landscape features. The database currently holds records of 800 veteran trees across the county; there may be many more unrecorded trees.

Although veteran trees are often immediately visually striking due to their size this is not the only indication that you are looking at a very old tree. Veterans have an important set of features including major trunk cavities, decay holes, missing limbs, large quantities of deadwood in the canopy, an abundance of fungal fruiting bodies, lichens and mosses. These trees are vital for supporting a large and often unique variety of wildlife including insects, birds and bats.

If you think you can help us record veteran trees in your area we would love to hear from you. Further information about identifying and recording your veteran tree is available by contacting Conservation Officer Heather Dixon:

Email hdixon@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk or Phone **01305 264620**.



Photo © Heather Dixon

Lytchett Bay



The Great Heath – working in partnership for wildlife and people



The Great Heath purchase of the eastern half of Lytchett Bay created the new DWT Lytchett Bay Nature Reserve, managed in partnership with Amphibian and Reptile Conservation. Now landowning neighbours have come together to form the Lytchett Bay Nature Park right around the Bay - for wildlife and people. The SNCI at Lytchett Bay View, (our SNCI Reference is SY99/067 Border Road) owned by Lytchett Minster and Upton Town Council, is a key part of this linking chain of wildlife habitat and provides easy access and beautiful views for locals and walkers on the Poole Harbour Trail.

The wet woods, pools and reed bed at Lytchett Bay View are a refuge for birds all year round and the Bay itself hosts important numbers of wintering wading birds and wildfowl. Habitat improvements, supported by The Great Heath and our volunteers, include managing vegetation to open up the ponds for invertebrates and clearing willow to connect reed bed habitat. The Town Council's new board walk, path and information board make this a great example of linked, accessible habitat for wildlife and people.

Still, shimmering waters, the flash of a kingfisher, the 'peep' of a wading bird, the bright dazzle of a dragonfly and the deep pink of a pyramidal orchid. Just a few of the sights and sounds of Lytchett Bay, a quiet haven for wildlife and people in a sheltered north-western corner of Poole Harbour.

Grassland Restoration Project near Yetminster

Sharron Abbott

We will be undertaking a project starting next year to help maintain and restore or recreate wildflower-rich grassland areas within the parishes of Yetminster and Ryme Intrinsic. This will involve re-surveying the existing SNCIs and offering advice to owners and practical support where appropriate to maintain or improve their wildflower richness, (for example, using volunteers or contractors to remove encroaching scrub/bracken etc.).

We will also be looking for any extra areas which might be of SNCI quality, or where

owners would be interested in creating wildflower-rich grassland from fields which are currently not so interesting. The work needed to do this, such as checking suitability, spreading green hay, or harvesting and spreading wildflower seed can be done by DWT.

So, if you have land in these two parishes, and would be interested in increasing the wildflower richness of your grassland, or if you know anyone else who might be, please get in touch on 01305 264620 or email sabbott@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

CONTACTS

For further information on SNCIs: Sharron Abbott 01305 264620
Dorset Wildlife Trust
West Dorset Team Office: 01300 321329

For advice on Environmental Stewardship: Initially contact our West Dorset Team. They can advise you as to the best person to contact within Natural England for further help.
Forestry Authority for: West Dorset & Weymouth & Portland - Chris Gibbard 01392 834278 and for the rest of Dorset - Ian Briscoe 01392 834259
FWAGSW: Alex Butler 07557 094029

SNCI Project supported by

