



‘ *Where have all the (Wild)Flowers gone, Long time passing.....*’



Since the 1930s, over 97% of our Wildflower meadows have been lost.

We have some of the rarest and most species-rich habitats, but they occupy less than 1% of the UK’s land cover.

This has contributed to a profound impact on our wildlife, including birds, small mammals, bees and other insects. Butterflies, moths, bees, wasps, dung beetles, song thrushes and hedgehogs are amongst the most at risk, along with freshwater insects such as stoneflies, caddisflies and mayflies.

Many bee species have declined and two bumblebee species have even become extinct in the UK since 1940.

These are stark and worrying facts. Is there a solution?

YES! - We need more Wildflowers - Here’s why

Wildflowers and wildflower-rich habitats support insects in many ways, providing lots of things that insects need: food in the form of leaves, nectar and pollen, also shelter and places to breed. In return, insects pollinate the wildflowers, enabling them to develop seeds to spread and grow in other places.



In the UK, we need a wide range of wildflowers to provide pollinators (bees and other insects that pollinate plants) with local food sources across the seasons – including times when crops aren’t producing flowers. Many of our favourite fruits, vegetables and nuts rely on insect pollination. For example, in the UK strawberries, raspberries, cherries and apples need to be pollinated by insects to get a good crop.

Wildflowers also contribute to scientific and medical research. Some UK native wildflowers contain compounds which can be used in drugs to treat diseases. For example, foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea*) contain chemicals used to treat heart conditions. If we were to lose wildflower species, we could lose potential new medicines.

There are also strong cultural bonds that exist with recognisable species such as poppies, which remind us of lives lost in world wars, or of dandelions and daisies, which may remind us of childhood summers.

Just as importantly, perhaps, wildflowers are beautiful and provide us with habitats that buzz with life. They help us to take notice of nature all around us and encourage us to be more active outdoors; just looking at them can improve our mental health and our sense of well-being



How do Wildflowers affect other forms of Wildlife?

Wildflowers support insects, which are eaten by birds, bats, amphibians, reptiles and small mammals, all of whom contribute to the cycle of life. But fewer wildflowers mean fewer insects, fewer insects mean fewer birds and other small creatures It's a downward spiral.

Why is it Happening?

The loss of their habitats and overuse of pesticides are two major reasons why these insects and small creatures are dying out eight times faster than large mammals.

There is a significant threat against bees and other insects from our changing land use. As cities grow and agriculture becomes more intensive, we are losing the wild spaces, hedgerows and meadows where they can find flowers and food.

Greenspaces around public buildings are often traditionally managed to look tidy, with tightly mown grass and shrubs; it may look neat, but it's of little value for wildlife.

Insects don't like manicured lawns, and whilst cultivated double flowers may look lovely in the garden, they are bad news for pollinators, as they typically don't produce pollen and their nectar is hidden deep inside the flowers.

Can we do anything to reverse the decline? - YES!

Managed in a wildlife-friendly way many private and public spaces could be great wildlife refuges. And it can be cheaper to manage these areas less intensively as well!

As individuals and as a local community, we can take some simple, but effective measures.

Individually..... Be less tidy!

Allow rough grass to grow along a hedge, or leave a nettle patch or brambles to flourish.

A pile of logs in a shady corner will feed beetle larvae and shelter animals such as frogs, toads and slow worms and will encourage hedgehogs to hibernate in them. (If you're having a bonfire, check for sleeping hedgehogs first)

Lock up your lawnmower!

Wherever possible, we should let grass and flowers grow for longer, to allow flowering and seeding.

Here's how to mow your lawn for wildlife:

To maximise the number of flowers and nectar on lawns a 'Mohican' style cut in gardens is recommended, with some areas of lawn cut once a month and others left long and uncut. This gives 'short-grass' plants like daisies and white clover the chance to flower in profusion, boosting nectar production tenfold. Areas of longer, unmown grass welcome a wider range of flowers, including nectar-rich plants like oxeye daisy, field scabious and knapweed, providing a feast of nectar for our hungry pollinators.

In our Community.....

Schools are increasingly recognising the value of wild areas and gardens where children can learn about nature and benefit from having first-hand experience of the wildlife on their doorstep. Maybe this is something our village school could explore, if it's not happening already?

Churchyards are often tranquil, reflective places, many of which have native trees in abundance and even traces of ancient wildflower-rich grassland. Increasingly, local churches are choosing to leave some areas a bit wilder to encourage wildlife. Maybe an area of our cemetery could be left to grow for wildlife?



In our village, some of our many public areas of grass could be managed for wildflowers, with the edges being cut short, but an area in the middle being sown with wildflower seeds and then left uncut for flowers and grass to grow.

With the support of our Parish Council, I hope that we, as a Community, will be able to 're-wild' some of our managed green spaces, to create wildflower havens for our wildlife and for the benefit of us all.

Allison Samaloussi, July 2021

Further information can be found on wildlife websites, including:

- <https://www.buglife.org.uk/> <https://www.growwilduk.com/> <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/>
<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/> <https://butterfly-conservation.org/>

