



# Wild About Barrow

12<sup>th</sup> July 2021

## Thumbs up for Cotes Road Verge

The results of the Cotes Road verge have been received and provide very encouraging results.

In June Catherine Hand of NatureSpot and Alison Rushton from **Wild About Barrow** surveyed the site and found a total of 32 wildflower species which represents a good diversity for a verge of this size.

The survey focussed mainly on the grasses and wildflowers. It was important to identify which species are already present in order to assess the quality of the grassland habitat before deciding on ongoing management.

Trees and hedge species were also included as they provide more wildlife value. Three trees were found : Ash, Field Maple and Blackthorn. The shade and shelter they give often supports species of plants and animals that prefer these conditions, adding to the overall diversity.

The survey revealed a number of interesting species which are often found in quality meadow . These include Black



Field maple (*Acer campestre*)

Medick, Autumn Hawkbit and Red Clover. The latter two are indicator species and provide a clear signal about the value of the verge.



Autumn hawkbit (*Leontodon autumnalis*)

The report concludes that the verge has a good species diversity which provides valuable wildlife habitat due to the tall and dense vegetation.

It is recommended that the verge is managed by stopping mowing between April and August. This allows the grassland to grow, flower and set seed.

### **Verges as Wildlife Habitat**

Grassland road verges represent a habitat that has suffered a devastating decline over the last century. 98% of traditional wildflower meadows have disappeared in Britain so the plants and animals that rely on this habitat have very few places left where they can thrive. Road verges, if appropriately managed, can help to reverse this trend and make an important contribution to supporting local biodiversity.

Regularly mown verges offer very little to wildlife. Without a habitat that supports insects the whole food chain collapses leading to declines in birds and mammals such as hedgehogs.

Wildlife found at Cotes Road Verge



Nursery web spider

Ringlet butterfly

### **Recommended Cut**

At the end of the summer the verge will be cut short and the cuttings left for a few days to dry and drop their seeds. To avoid depriving wildlife of important cover and over-wintering sites, only one half of the verge will be cut each year, leaving the other half as tall vegetation, then alternating the areas the following year.

### **Cutting help**

Cutting the verge will need a strimmer or a reciprocating blade mower. If anyone has one of these, please contact **Wild About Barrow**. Another option is to cut by hand with a scythe, so this could be an option if anyone is keen to learn this skill.

We will definitely need help to cut the verge so please contact us if you would like to help.

### **Removing Cuttings**

Once dry, it is effectively hay and so is ideal food and bedding for horses, rabbits and other pets. Local residents with these animals will be welcome to collect the hay from the verge. As ragwort is present, volunteers will be needed to hand-pull this before cutting as it is poisonous to horses and livestock.

Charnwood Borough Council will provide brown bins and take away any unwanted cuttings.

It is important to prevent the build up of a mat of dried stems, which will smother the smaller plants. Wildflowers thrive on poor soil and since cuttings will enrich the soil as it gradually decomposes, it needs to be removed.

### **Increasing Biodiversity**

Most verges are rich in nutrients, especially nitrogen, which allows plants such as Cow Parsley, Nettle and Docks – all present on the verge - to dominate. Whilst these species do support a lot of wildlife, they also out-compete the smaller species leading to a reduced floral diversity overall. With the removal of cuttings, these species will reduce and

lead to a wider range of flower and grass species to naturally develop over several years.

Yellow Rattle is a common plant in many wildflower meadows and is generally desirable as it parasitizes grasses so they weaken and become less dominant, leaving space for more wildflowers. We will sow this in Autumn, so again, please volunteer!



Red clover (*Trifolium pratense*)

## Network of verges

We have one of 54 Leicestershire verges which have been surveyed by NatureSpot volunteers. You might be interested in some of the stats that have emerged:

- 18 volunteers contributed 335 hours to surveying
- 339 species (across 26 different wildlife groups)
- 1937 records
- 172 different wildflower species
- 30 different grass species
- 32 average number of wildflower and grass species on each verge

- 62 highest number of wildflower and grass species (Broughton Astley, Cosby Corner)
- 27 indicator species for Local Wildlife Site designation
- 71 species considered desirable in quality wildflower meadows

## Barrow in Bloom

Barrow in Bloom (of which **Wild About Barrow** is a sub-group) is a part of Britain in Bloom and has 3 core areas: horticultural achievement, environmental responsibility and community participation. **WAB** is dedicated to the second area but we can't do this without you. If you would like to volunteer check out our pages on Barrow upon Soar village website or our Facebook group, or email **WAB**.

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*Every space in Britain must be used to help wildlife " Sir David Attenborough*

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**Think global: act local**

[Wildaboutbarrow@gmail.com](mailto:Wildaboutbarrow@gmail.com)