

Addingham's wildflower mini-meadows

End of season report

October 2024

We've now come to the end of another very busy year creating and managing our miniwildflower meadows throughout the village. All sites have now been cut and the cuttings have been collected and taken away for composting by Bradford Council.

We look after nine sites:

- Old Station Way (Bradford Council)
- Memorial Recreational Field, northeast corner (Parish Council)
- Football Field bank (Parish Council)
- Hoffman Wood Field, north and south margins (Parish Council)
- Skipton Road bank (Bradford Council)
- Primary School, front corner
- Methodist Church Graveyard, north side
- Craven Crescent Green (Incommunities)
- Ferryman's Green (Bradford Council)

For a map of sites, see <https://www.addinghamenvironmentgroup.org.uk/wildlife/wildflowers>

Except for some late autumn sowing at one or two sites, everything is now ready **to start the annual cycle again** when we look forward next year to seeing early spring flowers such as celandines, cowslips, dandelions, milkmaids and speedwells blossoming and providing pollen and nectar sources for queen bumblebees and other insects emerging from hibernation.

Dandelions, often maligned as weeds, are the star of the show because of their abundance and the quality of the pollen and nectar each flowerhead provides. Protecting dandelion populations is one of the principal reasons for observing “**no mow may**”.

Old Station Way (OSW)

One of our flagship sites is Old Station Way, a grassland on the site of the former Addingham Railway Station. It's conversion to a wildflower meadow began in 2015 by Addingham Garden Friends, a year before the Environment Group was formed. Following **repeated sowing with yellow rattle and the planting of hundreds of plug plants** by our volunteers since then it is now a stunning site. This year, 2024, has been especially glorious, despite a cutting mistake by the Council, as orchids, red clover and yellow rattle have been profuse.



The succession of species that typically now occur over the year at OSW has been excellently documented by Jan Hindle in her piece in the last village newsletter. She

describes how the spring and early summer species assemblage is replaced by later flowering species such as betony, scabious and knapweed and explains why **it's necessary to be patient during the month of August when the grass is long and the site can look untidy**. This is the crucial time when seed heads are breaking open and seeds are falling to the ground ready for germination the following year, allowing populations to be maintained sustainably into the future.

Bee and Butterfly Monitoring

We have been monitoring OSW and other sites for bees and butterflies now for five years. A principal reason why wildflower meadows are being created in communities like ours and all over the country is in an **attempt to halt the national decline in insect populations that is occurring**. This is a serious problem not least in the Pennines, where most of our traditional hay meadows have been lost.

Whether the sudden drop in invertebrate numbers this year is due to changes in land management or to adverse weather conditions is difficult to say but the data our volunteers are collecting will enable us to document the extent insect decline in Addingham as well, hopefully, their recovery next year.



The wider picture

Old Station Way has been a remarkable success but it should not be viewed in isolation. Within the village it is just one of a number of sites that form **a mosaic of habitats, allowing bees, butterflies, hoverflies, moths and other pollinators to move between sites to find food and nesting sites**.



There is also a growing number of landowners on **Addingham Moorside** that we work with who are equally committed to the creation of wildflower hay meadows and the conservation of insect populations.

These sites in turn provide stepping stones to the Aire Valley connecting our populations to the Lancaster – Leeds B line part of Buglife's Bee Together project

(<https://www.buglife.org.uk/our-work/b-lines/b-lines-north-england/conservation>).

This project aims to create and link wildflower meadows along a **pollinator highway between Leeds and Lancaster** to reverse the decline of wild pollinators. It is led by the Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust (<https://www.ydmt.org/what-we-do/landscape-and-wildlife/bee-conservation>).

Setting an example

Our work creating wildflower mini-meadows in the village has attracted considerable interest. Last year Friends of the Dales brought together members of **community groups and parish councils from villages throughout the Dales** to an event in the Memorial Hall to showcase our work. We were invited to write a follow-up article in their quarterly magazine, the Yorkshire Dales Society Review, see: <https://www.addinghamenvironmentgroup.org.uk/wildlife/wildflowers>

This year Friends of the Dales held their Annual General Meeting in the Memorial Hall and we were asked to take their members on a guided walk of our wildflower sites. We also hosted the Wharfedale Naturalists Society botany group who showed a special interest in Old Station Way and the Craven Crescent Green sites.



The future

Conversion of species poor grasslands to species rich meadows is a slow process. It takes many years using yellow rattle to weaken the dominant grasses and repeated annual grass cutting and removal of the arisings to reduce soil fertility. **We speed up the process by sowing wildflower seed and planting plug plants.**



Although the Old Station Way and Skipton Road Bank sites are quite long established and illustrate what can be achieved, other sites, such as Craven Crescent Green and Ferryman's Green, are less well advanced. Future sowing and planting will focus on these newer sites. **The grass cutting regime, including the cutting of grass paths where necessary, needs to continue as in the past and be maintained long term.**

All sites are situated on our village bee and butterfly transects. We hope our volunteers will be able to continue monitoring populations and that we will be able to **document the effectiveness of our efforts not only in bringing back native wildflower populations into the village but also in halting the decline in pollinator populations.**

Acknowledgements

The success of our work has been and is dependent on:

- **Bradford Council**, for their permission to work on BMDC owned sites (Old Station Way, Ferryman's Green, Skipton Road Bank) and their willingness to cut and collect the grass at the end of the season;
- **Addingham Parish Council**, for their permission to work on Council owned sites (Memorial Recreation Ground, Hoffman Wood Field) and for their liaison with BMDC;
- **Incommunities** for their permission to work on Craven Crescent Green and for funding;

- **Addingham Methodist Church** for permission to work on the Methodist Church Graveyard;
- **Addingham Primary School** for permission to work on School grounds;
- **Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust** for advice and funding;
- **Wharfedale Naturalists Society** for funding;
- **Addingham Beer Festival** for funding;
- **Addingham Environment Group volunteers** for hard work throughout the year and growing plug plants from seed;
- **Local residents** for their help, conversations and questions

Rick Battarbee and Jan Hindle

October 16th 2024.