

The Old Ragged School
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FAO Marion Fox Goddard

Fernwood Parish Council

Dear Marion,

It was good to meet you recently. Thank you for inviting me to Fernwood to assess the area of woodland. I have the following thoughts on its management and enhancement.



To enhance the small area of woodland I suggest planting shrubs to create structural diversity. Appropriate species would be holly *Ilex aquifolium* and yew *Taxus baccata*. Both of these species tolerate shade. Avoid planting them in areas known to have botanical interest. The existing glades should be maintained through management and in areas where the ground layer is poor trees should be managed to allow more light to penetrate. Shaded ground allows ivy to dominate and suppress plants that are in the seed bank. Ideally, ivy should be removed from the ground layer using

mechanical tools rather than chemicals which can have a negative impact on non-target species. Monitor and where necessary control adverse impacts of recreational use on habitats and species within the woodland (e.g. by restricting or imposing conditions on public access to parts of the woodland).

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The path between the areas of woodland should be managed to create the structure in this illustration. A diverse range of ecological niches will be created comprising a botanically rich margin to the path, dense scrub and taller trees. This provides a simple example of a wildlife corridor that would provide good connectivity between areas of woodland or grassland.

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Ivy is a native evergreen climber that has an outstanding value for wildlife. It is not parasitic, only using the



tree for support, nor harmful to healthy trees. There should rarely be any reason for removing it from trees. If ivy encroaches into the tree canopy it can act like a sail and cause branches to break but the resulting dead wood and cavities provide additional habitat and would be a part of semi-natural woodland. I fully acknowledge that in public areas falling branches are a potential hazard. If you wish to prevent ivy reaching the canopy and potentially smothering trees, I recommend cutting at the top rather than the base to maintain it on the trunk. The latter strategy would kill the plant. Ivy provides nesting opportunities for spotted flycatcher, robin and wren. Its abundant berries ripen in late winter, which is valuable to thrushes when other food can be scarce. It flowers in the autumn, when few other species do, is rich in nectar and attracts many late flying insects, which are valuable prey for insectivorous birds. Dense ivy can also provide roosting sites for bats. However, where ivy is dominating the ground layer it

will prevent establishment of other woodland plants and therefore it should be removed by hand. This is a labour intensive method but is preferable to using chemicals that could have a negative impact on other flora.

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Every effort should be made to increase amounts of standing and fallen deadwood where it is considered safe to do so." *All forms of deadwood are valuable for invertebrates, and the more varied the deadwood resource the better. Deadwood on trees is overwhelmingly more valuable than deadwood on the ground, and large pieces of deadwood are more valuable than small pieces. Good deadwood sites are characterised by trees living into old age, dying natural deaths, and being left.*" (Kirby1998).



Standing dead wood provides excellent habitat for invertebrates and foraging and nesting habitat for woodpeckers and nuthatch. Try not to be over tidy unless trees are a potential hazard. Felling may have to take place where there is a safety hazard, but only if remedial surgery (pollarding, crown reduction, etc.) proves to be impractical or unsuccessful. Felled and naturally fallen trees should be retained in situ, or, if it has to be moved e.g. where it falls across a pathway, it should be used to create habitat stacks nearby.



Habitat stacks provide nesting habitat for birds and shelter for a variety of wildlife. Avoid creating habitat stacks where there is known botanical interest.

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Sycamore regeneration is dominating within this area. It would be beneficial to remove it to allow the rest of the understorey to establish. Ideally small whips would be hand pulled and the rest cut to ground level and the stumps treated with an appropriate herbicide.

Bramble



Wildlife thrives in untidy, tangled corners where food and shelter can be found. Areas of bramble provide good habitat for nesting birds and the fruits and seeds are eaten by a variety of wildlife. The aim should be to create varied age stands so that there is always some new growth through to mature stands that provide a range of invertebrate habitat.

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Value of Nettles for Wildlife

Stinging nettles support more than 40 kinds of insects, for whom the sting can form a protective shield against grazing animals. Many nettle patches hold overwintering insects which swarm around fresh spring nettles and provide early food for ladybirds. These same aphids are eaten by blue tits and other woodland birds. In late summer the seeds produced are food for many seed-eating birds, such as house sparrows, chaffinches, and bullfinches. Nettles are also a magnet for other insect-eaters like hedgehogs, shrews, frogs and toads, at all times of year. Certain moths like nettles, as do many of the UK's most colourful and best known butterflies, such as the Small Tortoiseshell and Peacock butterflies. Their larvae feed in large groups in silken tents at the top of the nettle stems. Nettles are often regarded as a weed, and are removed as soon as they appear, but they are excellent for many different types of wildlife.

Grassland Enhancement



Where there is already a vegetation cover, plug plants offer a more effective means of creating a wild flower meadow and do not require the use of herbicide. Where there is coarse vegetation, cutting to 5-10cm by flail mower and removing the cut material will normally leave open patches of soil. These are ideal sites for insertion of wild flower plugs. Repeated cutting and removal of cut material will maintain control over surviving vegetation, with spot treatments of glyphosate or other appropriate herbicide to eradicate and unwanted species. Using plants rather than

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seeds is reliable, offers total control over planting arrangement and flowering normally starts within the first season. Plants may be used both to enrich the existing flora and in conjunction with seed on bare sites. Typical wild flower planting densities range from 5/m² to 10/m². One plant species that may be appropriate to introduce is yellow rattle. Yellow rattle parasitizes grasses to some degree and reduces their dominance within the sward. Alternatively, I have attached a document 'Mini-meadow' that provides a methodology for creating a meadow using seed.

Typically, the meadow will require cutting in late August or even early September if ground conditions allow. This will, however, depend on the species introduced. This will allow native herbaceous species in the sward to flower and set seed. This in turn will provide food for butterflies and other insects. Arisings (cuttings) should be left to dry for 24-48 hours to allow invertebrates to escape, before being removed from site or placed in an area of low botanical interest such as under adjacent shrubs. The arisings should be removed to avoid an increase in soil fertility. This will encourage a greater diversity of plant species. High nutrient levels benefit a few nitrogen hungry species that then out compete other plants in the meadow. You may find that following a cut there will be a flush of new growth, particularly grasses. A cut in October or in late March can reduce the vigour of grasses reducing their competitiveness the following spring.



I note that the meadow area is referred to as species rich grassland but there is no reference to what is present. My concern is that the grasses have become dominant to the detriment of broadleaved flowering plants. I am thinking that additional cuts may be beneficial in autumn and early spring to reduce the vigour of the grasses. All arisings (cuttings) should be removed and deposited in an area of low botanical interest.

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The biodiversity of the site could be further enhanced by the installation of bat boxes. Four boxes should be erected in close proximity on mature trees. They should face different directions to allow bats the opportunity to change roost sites according to weather conditions at the time. The boxes should also be situated so bats have a clear flight path to them

<http://www.nhbs.com/title/195745/nhbs-kent-bat-box>



House Sparrow is on the red list of birds of conservation concern. They are gregarious and like to nest in loose colonies. They require a nest box with a 32mm nest hole. I suggest that you mount individual boxes on mature trees along the boundary of the site.

<http://www.nhbs.com/title/view/163264>

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Spotted flycatcher is a Red List Bird of Conservation Concern due to a long-term decline in all regions and habitats; 70% decline since the 1960's. This species is a summer visitor to the UK, arriving from Africa in May to breed and leave again in July and August. In order to help this species, I suggest installing a couple of open-fronted bird boxes (see example below).



The nest boxes should be positioned so that they are facing north-east and have a clear outlook, but partially concealed by a climbing plant such as ivy, at a height of between 5-9 feet. Ideally, the location should have suitable perches nearby for adults and young to feed from. In order to provide protection to a brood of eggs and nestlings you may wish to cover the nest box in heavy gauge wire mesh that will allow access for spotted flycatcher but prevent predation by squirrels, crows and great spotted woodpecker. The mesh should radiate out from the box so that predators cannot reach through to predate the young in the box.

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Do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss any of the above.

Yours sincerely,

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President

Sir Andrew Buchanan Bt.

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