



Wildlife in God's Acre

Background

In April 2017 Caring for God's Acre was awarded £3,000 from the AONB Conservation Fund and the Stiperstones & Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme Small Grant Scheme to deliver a citizen science project in the churchyards that are found within both the AONB and the LPS areas.

The Conservation Fund is for projects which deliver either or both of the priorities:

- Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, landscape, wildlife or heritage of the Shropshire Hills AONB.
- Educational and awareness-raising activities relating to the AONB and its conservation, especially involving young people.

Original targets

- To develop a team of volunteers trained to use our bespoke botanical survey system; The Burial Ground Botanical Companion.
- To offer additional training to the group, depending on who got involved. We anticipated:
 - Grassland plant identification including grasses and sedges
 - Fungi including grassland fungi such as waxcaps
 - Invertebrates
 - Veteran and notable trees
- We aimed to lead a minimum of 6 events in 6 churchyards or cemeteries and have a final celebration. We anticipated between 10 and 25 volunteers.
- Hold a celebratory event in early 2018

RESULTS

Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, landscape, wildlife or heritage of the Shropshire Hills AONB.

The project has brought together recorders and church wardens and highlighted the biodiversity value of churchyards. By generating new biological records, we have shown the Shropshire recording community, the volunteers and the diocese the some of the wildlife interest of these sites. It has been an eye-opener to discover how good the fungi records have been, usually from only one visit to each

site. There will be more unrecorded fungi as they do not all fruit at the same time, so a one-day survey will never record all species present.

As well as survey data, we have been able to give some management advice to churchwardens, showing them some of the interesting plants and explaining how to manage for them. We have explained how they could involve the Churchyard Task Team to help with management should they need to.

Educational and awareness-raising activities relating to the AONB and its conservation, especially involving young people.

We have trained the volunteers in biological identification offering training in botany, mycology, entomology and identification of reptiles and amphibians. The volunteers have been interested to discover how good churchyards are for wildlife and have developed an interest in these sites.

Total number of volunteers who attended one or more of our events was 34.

Total number of recording events was 16 plus the final celebration.



Event	Date	Site	Number of volunteers
Grassland survey	22.05.17	St Etheldreda, Hyssington Holy Trinity, Middleton-in-Chirbury	14
Grassland survey	05.06.17	St John the Evangelist, Newcastle on Clun St George, Clun Clun cemetery	2
Grassland and invertebrate survey	17.06.17	St Margaret, Ratlinghope St John the Baptist, Myndtown	11
Grassland survey	20.06.17	All Saints, Norbury St Michael & All Angels, Wentnor	4
Grassland survey	11.07.17	Holy Trinity, Hope All Saints, Shelve	6
Grassland survey	16.07.17	Stiperstones Baptist Chapel	3
Reptile & Amphibian Survey	21.07.17	St John the Baptist, Bishops Castle	18
Moth trapping	27.07.17	St Margaret, Ratlinghope	6
Moth trapping	13.08.17	St Etheldreda, Hyssington	12
Fungi survey	21.10.17	St John the Baptist, Bishops Castle St Peter, More	2
Fungi survey	24.10.17	Holy Trinity, Middleton-in-Chirbury	9
Fungi survey	28.10.17	All Saints, Norbury St Margaret, Ratlinghope	10
Fungi survey	31.10.17	St Michael, Chirbury St Nicholas, Churchstoke St Mary the Virgin, Snead	3
Fungi survey	3.11.17	St John the Evangelist, Newcastle on Clun	8
Fungi survey	9.11.17	St Edith's, Church Pulverbatch St Mary, Habberley St Michael & All Angels, Lydbury North	7
Fungi survey	3.11.17	St Marys, Bettws y Crwyn	8
Final celebration	15.03.18	Cardingmill Valley Tearoom	28

Lessons Learnt

This type of citizen science is really popular and there is an appetite to do more of it. We were surprised by the number of professional and trained volunteers who came forward and led training. We had 7 people running events for nothing or for travel expenses and to accommodate this we increased the numbers of events.

Attendance was mixed, ranging from 18 to 2. This is a reflection of several factors:

- 1 Weather made a lot of difference – the days with attendance of 2 had really bad weather forecasts

- 2 Several of the volunteers also volunteer elsewhere and were already committed, often with the Shropshire Wildlife Trust
- 3 The visible presence of fungi is weather dependent and so these surveys were planned at short notice making it more likely that people had prior commitments

There was an interest in doing tree surveys, but we responded to the volunteer trainers who came forward and used their skills which were botany, mycology and entomology.

There was little involvement from the clergy due most probably to their workload. All were pleased to hear that the project was happening though and put us in touch with churchwardens who were all helpful and interested.

Evaluation forms were filled in by 21 people at the celebration event including 15 volunteers and 4 church wardens.

People were asked if they had enjoyed being part of the project:

14 people responded Very Much

6 people responded Yes

1 churchwarden didn't answer this question

When asked if they would be interested in surveying in burial grounds in 2018 or, if churchwardens and clergy, having surveyors visit their sites:

16 responded Yes

1 responded Maybe

1 responded No

