



## Sowing the Seed in God's Acre

### Background

In April 2019 Caring for God's Acre was awarded £1,500 from the AONB Conservation Fund to deliver a citizen science project in the some of the churchyards that are found within the AONB.

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.

Churchyards and cemeteries within the AONB are known to be exceptional for biodiversity. This includes ancient trees, flower-rich meadow, rare fungi, lichens and also the invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, mammals and birds which rely on this rich flora. Through this project we aimed to learn more about the biodiversity of those sites that are currently unknown and to improve the management of sites where we are already active. We sowed Yellow Rattle seed to make the wildflower meadow areas easier and more sustainable to manage and we collected seed from burial grounds to spread their biodiversity further afield within the AONB, including verges and small meadows. We continue to tell people about the fantastic biodiversity of these places and encourage new volunteers to get involved.

### Original targets

- Organise volunteer surveying of the wildlife of 10 burial grounds across the AONB
- Organise grassland management volunteer sessions in 5 churchyards (scything & raking)
- Organise one training session in meadow management
- Organise 3 seed collecting sessions in churchyards or meadows within or near the AONB
- Organise 3 seed planting sessions in churchyards, on verges or in meadows including Housing Association land

### 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. 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 Caring for God's Acre Conservation 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.

Working with the South Shropshire Youth Forum we have given young people a taster of practical conservation and have worked with Clun primary school, encouraging the older children to tell the younger ones about the interest of Clun churchyard.

Total number of volunteers who attended one or more of our events was 37 with an addition 47 school children. These were from Clun school where years 5 and 6 worked with us in the churchyard on three separate afternoons and then explained and showcased their project work to the younger children from the nursery, reception and year 1.

Total number of recording events was 8, covering 10 sites.

Total number of sowing the seed events was 9, collecting and strewing green hay or collecting and sowing yellow rattle seed.

Total number of practical conservation tasks in churchyards within the AONB was 31.

Total number of volunteer days was 553 or which 119 were school children and 24 were young people.

Event	Date	Site	No of volunteers
Management work	02.04.19	Bromfield	10
Management work	09.04.19	Stoke St Milborough	16
Management work	18.04.19	Claverley	2
Management work	23.04.19	Hopesay	12
Amphibian & reptile survey	25.04.19	Hopesay	22
Management work	30.04.19	Knowbury	8
Management work	09.05.19	Much Wenlock	17
Management work	21.05.19	Munslow	12
Management work	23.05.19	Acton Scott	4
Management work	06.06.19	Hopesay	5
Collecting yellow rattle seed then sowing	10.06.19	Jinlye NT meadow to Onibury meadow	4
Collecting yellow rattle seed then sowing	12.06.19	Jinlye NT meadow to verges	6
Collecting yellow rattle seed then sowing	17.06.19	Jinlye NT meadow to St Milborough churchyard	3
Collecting yellow rattle seed then sowing	19.06.19	Jinlye NT meadow to Caynham churchyard	5
Collecting and strewing green hay	02.07.19	Bishops Castle churchyard to verges	17
Management work	11.07.19	Hope Bagot	16
Management work	16.07.19	Acton Scott	7
Grassland survey	17.07.19	Acton Scott & Hope Bowdler churchyard	13

Collecting and strewing green hay	20.07.19	Norbury churchyard to verges	2
Management work	23.07.19	Bromfield	11
Collecting and strewing green hay	01.08.19	Ratlinghope churchyard to Onibury meadow	5
Grassland survey	09.07.19	Bromfield churchyard	5
Collecting and strewing green hay	09.07.19	Bromfield churchyard to Onibury meadow	13
Grassland survey	21.07.19	Hope Bagot	2
Collecting and strewing green hay	23.07.19	Hope Bagot to Onibury meadow	18
Management work t work	23.07.19	Bromfield	11
Management work	05.08.19	Hopesay	9
Collecting and strewing green hay	15.08.19	Crug y Byddar to verges	7
Management work	22.08.19	Much Wenlock	5
Management work	27.08.19	Munslow	10
Management work	10.10.19	Alverley	7
Management work	15.10.19	Hope Bagot	8
Management work	22.10.19	Clunbury	12
Management work	05.11.19	Clungunford	11
Management work	19.11.19	Knowbury	13
Management work	14.01.20	Bromfield	15
Management work	21.01.20	Clunbury	12
Management work	28.01.20	Hopesay	9
Management work	04.02.20	Clunbury	12
Management work	11.02.20	Clun	6
Management work	18.02.20	Clungunford	2
Management work	27.02.20	Acton Scott	3
Management work	03.03.20	Munslow	5
Management work	05.03.20	Claverley	3
Management work	17.03.20	Caynham	7
Youth activity with SSYF	07.08.19	Bromfield churchyard	11
Youth activity with SSYF	21.08.20	Bromfield churchyard	13
Meadow training day	09.09.19	Discovery Centre	8
School activity with SSYF	08.01.20	Clun churchyard	24
School activity with SSYF	22.01.20	Clun churchyard	24
School activity with SSYF	05.02.20	Clun churchyard	24
School activity with SSYF	12.02.20	Clun churchyard	47

### Lessons Learnt

People really enjoy the mix of recording with practical tasks. They liked the idea of spreading the biodiversity of the burial grounds to other nearby areas and are keen to do more of this type of work. Clun school felt that this had been an interesting project, they would like to use the churchyard for a range of learning activities in the future and welcomed the fact that it is so close to the school.