

Establishment of a Wildflower Meadow at Moorend Spout

About 70 years ago I can remember sitting in fields that were full of beautiful wild flowers and teeming with wild life. There were huge ant hills, and my father showed me a skylark's nest complete with eggs. However, to quote Joni Mitchell, "you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone"

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=94bdMSCdw20>)

When the war started in 1939 we were all encouraged to 'dig for victory' and many of these sites were ploughed up and used to grow cereals. At that time we also became aware of the possibilities of increasing yields by applying fertilizers. Nitrogen and phosphate levels in grassland are often the limiting factors for growth, and grasses grow rapidly when provided with these elements. The growth of these grasses makes it difficult for the plants with the pretty flowers (now known as forbs) to compete and they are rapidly swamped. There are now less than 5% of the original wild flower meadows remaining. Nailsea is fortunate in having one of the best of these at Netcott's meadow to the north of Backwell Lake,



View of Netcott's Meadow 18th June 1995, with *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* (Common Spotted Orchid) x *D. praetermissa* (Southern Marsh Orchid)



Surveying quadrats at Netcott's Meadow 22nd July 2014. Gill Brown, Anne Halpin, Emma Davis and Joe Middleton

recently declared one of the 'Coronation Meadows' of which there are now 60 in the British Isles. This site is managed by Avon Wildlife Trust (AWT) under the supervision of Joe Middleton, Reserves Manager for the AWT.

In 2013 Prince Charles wrote -

"My Coronation Meadows idea came to me when I read Plantlife's 2012 report and fully appreciated just how many wildflower meadows had been lost over the past 60 years.

This year, we are celebrating my mother's coronation so surely there is no better moment to end this destruction and to stimulate a new mood to protect our remaining meadows and to use them as springboards for the restoration of other sites and

the creation of new meadows right across the UK."

So the search was on for land which could be used to establish wildflower meadows using seed donated from the existing Coronation Meadows. Our field at Moorend Spout was identified as one of the recipient sites, meeting most of the established criteria. It is especially important to promote the growth of our insect pollinated plants in order to encourage our bee population which is increasingly under threat from the loss of these plants and from the widespread use of insecticides like the neonicotinoids.

The soil analysis showed that the nutrient levels were not excessive, and with a third party agreement signed, we were able to work with Joe Middleton to access the Communities Landfill Tax fund administered by Biffa.



Field gate and kissing gate below the embankment of the Land Yeo

In July some of the trustees studied the existing flora at Netcott's Coronation Meadow and at Moorend Spout, with guidance from Dr Anne Halpin – who is the recently appointed monitoring officer at AWT. We used line transects and quadrats to sample the plants on both sites. Our results will form the baseline for future sampling.

At the beginning of August 2014 the grass on our field at Moorend Spout was cut and the hay bales were removed, as we have done in three previous years. This time on the same day, a hay cut was made at Netcott's and this was taken to



Delivering hay cut from Netcott's 1st August 2014
Photograph by Rosemary Dennis



Scattering the hay at Moorend Spout, with the pond in the foreground.
Photograph by Rosemary Dennis

seen on the video of this process, which is now on our website. It is planned to repeat this procedure for three years, in the hope that we can establish the plants which grow at Netcott's on our own field, a procedure which has been successful on other sites in North Somerset.

We now have a herd of Dexter cattle on our field which are known to graze grassland in a way that encourages the forbs. In order to retain these cattle we have fenced off the Carr with mesh and barbed wire, leaving access to drinking water arising from a spring in the Carr. In the course of this work

we have established a new gate leading to the adjacent field to the east and another leading to the north side of the Carr, where we have also incorporated a kissing gate for the convenience of visitors to the site. We are having difficulty in laying the fence across the oil pipes due to the concerns of the MoD. We need to negotiate further with them to find a satisfactory solution to this problem. Since the pond could become contaminated by the cattle, this has been protected by an electric fence.



We now have three Dexter cows and their calves grazing our field
Photograph by Rosemary Dennis



Pond being filled by the fire brigade with water from the Land Yeo

The Trustees are grateful to Joe Middleton (Manager of the Coronation Meadow project, AWT), Dr Anne Halpin (Reserves Monitoring Officer, AWT), Margaret Westcott (access), Steve Yendole (hay cut and harrowing), Mike Watts (fencing) and Alan Paynter (grazier). We must again express our thanks to the volunteers who give their time and energy for the development of this nature reserve.

Pond

The Environment Agency is aware of the possibility that badgers, rabbits or water voles might cause leaks in the embankment of the Land Yeo, and for this reason they make a survey every year which involves removal of the vegetation with a flailing cutter.

We are permitted to extract 20 cubic metres of water each day from the river, which is done by means of a siphon since the river is at a higher level than the field. Unfortunately, in making the cut on the embankment in October 2013, the machinery used by the EA damaged the siphon and it was difficult to repair this quickly, so the water level in the pond dropped. Since we did not want the pond to dry out, we called on the fire brigade to pump water from the river to refill the pond. Ian Chambers has now buried the pipe more deeply and we have repaired the siphon allowing the water to again flow into our pond. We have made several improvements to our siphon and we are now using a bilge pump to prime the flow.

(We are grateful to Nailsea Fire Brigade for their help in filling the pond)

We have had a considerable growth of algae in the pond this year, so we have added several bales of barley straw which is said to control the algal growth.

http://www.ceh.ac.uk/sci_programmes/documents/barleystrawtocontrolalgae.pdf

We have also found a fish (Perch) in the pond although we are not sure how it could have arrived!

Sign post

We have repainted the signpost on Pound Lane marking the start of the public footpath leading to Moorend Spout using paint donated by Mike Woodley. The brackets supporting this sign had rusted through, and we have replaced these with stainless steel clamps provided by North Somerset Council, and installed by Peter Everitt. Details of the restoration may be found on our website under News - September 2014.

Towerhouse Wood

We continue to pull Himalayan Balsam from the gardens in Stonehenge Lane in the hope that we can prevent its invasion into Towerhouse Wood. This year we had a major effort to remove it in July and again in August, in association with Hattie Lupton, Sally Sharp and David Clay. We are making significant progress in the elimination of this aggressive alien, although it will take several years before we can safely say that we have won.

Gill Brown has set up a blog which includes news about Towerhouse Wood and some excellent wildlife photographs taken around Nailsea <http://gillyotter.wordpress.com> Gill says that the dormice are still thriving in the Wood.

Terry Smith

