

8. Helping Wildlife



This sheet gives suggestions for improving your site for wildlife.

STAY ORGANIC

Burial grounds have existed for hundreds of years with no herbicides, pesticides or damaging preservatives, which is one reason why they are so good for wildlife. Please don't change this!

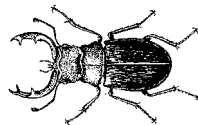
VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE!

Try to have a rich variety of habitats on your site. A burial ground with several different features such as trees and shrubs of different ages and shapes, long and short grass, hedges, walls and areas of scrub or coarse vegetation will shelter a great variety of wildlife.

The sum of the whole is greater than the individual parts.

DEADWOOD

Deadwood is fantastic for wildlife. A great many bacteria, fungi, lichens, worms, beetles and other invertebrates live in deadwood. In a natural forest, wood rots down either within a tree or else on the ground. In a burial site you may prefer to have a pile of deadwood away from visited areas or flowery grassland. If there is an area of tussocky grass then this could be a good spot for a deadwood pile.



Creating a good woodpile for wildlife

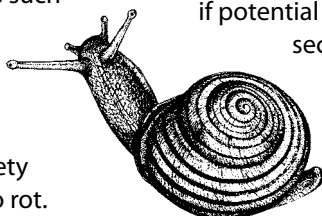
Pile up any prunings or sections of trees that have been felled. A variety of sizes is ideal as they will rot at different rates. Add to the woodpile whenever you carry out tree work; try to keep it over 50cm tall.

Locate the pile in a fairly shady, damp area, ideally surrounded by long grass or by trees and shrubs. A woodpile near to a wall or hedge can encourage animals to explore both.

Do not keep the area around the woodpile too tidy; leaves on the ground and coarse vegetation will make the woodpile more likely to attract animals such as slow worms and hedgehogs.

Tree stumps and standing deadwood

If a tree is felled or blows down then (if safety issues allow) consider leaving the stump to rot.



Different plants, fungi, birds and animals will use this, particularly if it is quite tall. Perhaps grow a climbing plant on it if the stump is unsightly. Think before you remove deadwood from within a tree. Do you really need to or could it be left for the woodpeckers?

IVY

Ivy provides excellent cover and food for wildlife, and dense ivy may contain nesting birds and roosting bats. Ivy flowers between September and November, providing nectar and pollen when little else is flowering. Ivy can be literally buzzing with bees and flies in the autumn. The fruit is eaten by many birds and small mammals. There may be places where you wish to remove or control ivy, such as veteran yews, but there may be other areas where it can be left. Encourage ivy to flower by teasing top shoots away from their support so that they hang free. (see sheet A9, Pesky Plants and Animals for advice on situations where ivy becomes a problem).



HEDGES, SHRUBS AND SCRUB

Variety is important for conservation so try to have a range of different trees and shrubs to benefit a wider range of creatures. Most burial sites have some mature or veteran trees but is there scope for a hedge or for shrubs?

When planting a new hedge try to use species which will bring wildlife into your site: hedgerow plants with flowers followed by berries and haws. Early or late flowering plants provide food when other plants are not flowering. These are particularly crucial for bumblebees.

Think about managing hedges for wildlife (see sheet A7, Caring for Hedgerows) allowing flowers, fruit and seeds for birds and other animals to feed on.

HABITAT BOXES

Burial grounds often have nooks and crannies for birds and animals for both nesting and over-wintering. You may want to create some artificial ones, particularly if potential homes have been lost. When rebuilding a section of old dry stone wall, consider making a woodpile nearby and putting a hedgehog box in tussocky grass near to the wall.

Habitat boxes also help people to see particular birds and other animals. A

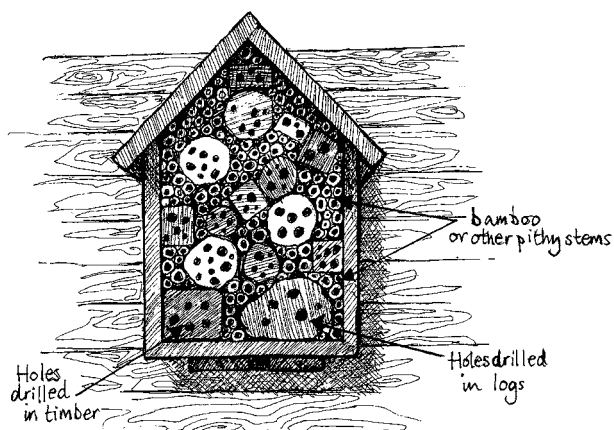
MANAGING CHURCHYARDS AND BURIAL GROUNDS

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blue tit nesting in a box on a tree trunk is easy to watch, the same bird in a scrub thicket nearly impossible!

Put up a nest box for swifts on a church or other tall building. Swifts are in need of homes.

Bird and bat box designs can be found on the internet or by contacting Caring for God's Acre partner organisations (see list below). Just enter 'making a nest box/hedgehog home/bat box' etc into an internet search engine.



MAKE A BEE HOTEL

To make a bee hotel fill a frame with hollow canes, such as sections of bamboo, elder or hogweed, bricks with holes, pinecones, straw etc. Basically the idea is to pack together lots of different sized holes which bees and other invertebrates will use.

The frame can be a section of drainage pipe (clay looks more attractive than plastic), a series of shelves made from planks of wood propped up with bricks or a simple wooden box.

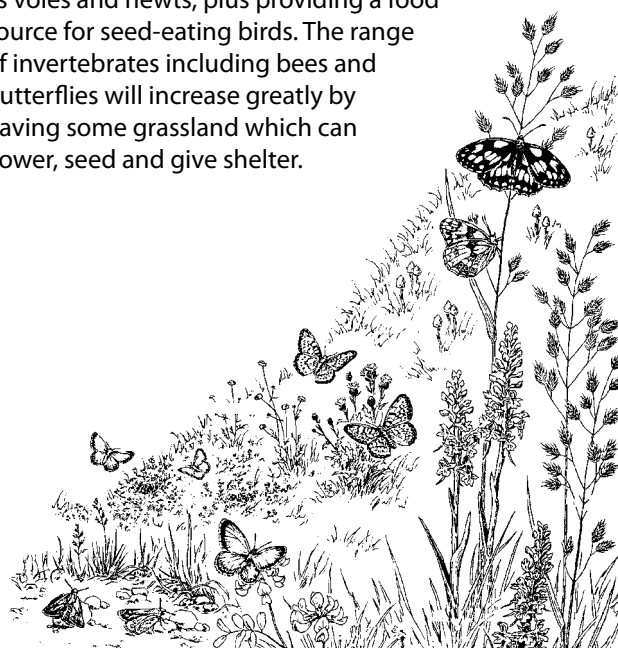
Fix your bee hotel securely in a sunny, sheltered place. It can be built up from the ground or fixed to a fence or wall. This will be used throughout the spring and summer and is a good way to watch insects.

WATER

Drinking water, particularly in times of little rain, can be a life saver. If this is on the ground then animals like birds and hedgehogs can use it. Put a large, flat dish in a shady place.

LONG AND TUSSOCKY GRASSLAND

Try to have an area of long or tussocky grass within your site, even if it is small. A strip against a wall or hedge will provide a corridor for animals such as voles and newts, plus providing a food source for seed-eating birds. The range of invertebrates including bees and butterflies will increase greatly by having some grassland which can flower, seed and give shelter.



Useful contacts

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation, www.arc.org.uk

Bat Conservation Trust – bat boxes and encouraging bats, www.bats.org.uk

British Hedgehog Preservation Society – hedgehog homes, www.britishhedgehogs.org.uk

British Trust for Ornithology – National Nest Box Week, www.bto.org

Bumblebee Conservation Trust – bee friendly plants, www.bumblebeeconservation.org

Caring for God's Acre, www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk

OPAL Explore Nature – building a bee hotel, www.opalexplornature.org

RSPB – nest boxes for many bird species including owls, www.rspb.org.uk

Swift Conservation – make a swift nest box, www.swift-conservation.org

Wildlife Trusts – hints on gardening for wildlife, www.wildlifetrusts.org