

## **St Mary's Churchyard, Walton**

Even in the countryside any open space that can provide a wildlife habitat is important. We don't have enough areas where wildflowers can grow undisturbed to support our insect, bird and wild animal populations. Insects are crucial because we rely on them to pollinate plants and feed many wild animals. Recently people have come to realize that churchyards can provide ideal spaces for wildflowers and wildlife to flourish. Managing these areas for wildlife can also give the added bonus of reducing the amount of effort and cost required to maintain them.

It has been decided to try to make the churchyard in Walton a better environment for wildlife and we are sure that some of you have noticed the changes going on in the churchyard.

Unfortunately these things don't happen by accident so it is necessary to have a strategy to improve the churchyard for wildlife. After consultation with the PPC and Cumbria Wildlife Trust it was decided that a plan would be developed for making the churchyard in Walton a wildlife friendly area. This year the plan is to leave some areas of the churchyard uncut so that we can see what wild plants appear among the grass and this should allow us to develop a strategy for improving the numbers of insect friendly plants, either by encouraging the ones that are already there or by adding to them by judicious sowing or planting. One idea is to encourage Yellow Rattle to grow in the churchyard. Yellow rattle is a useful in creating and enhancing wildflower meadows as it is a parasite which attaches itself to the roots of grass reducing grass growth and allowing wildflowers to grow.

This year we have also started to plant a hedge on the north side of the churchyard which in the fullness of time should provide shelter and sustenance to a range of wildlife.

There are also plans to tidy up the churchyard by pruning or removing some of the shrubs and trees, keeping the path clear of weeds and removing the ivy from the churchyard wall. Ivy is useful for wildlife but unfortunately it was pulling the wall apart so it was felt that it would be better removed. Ivy does grow happily in other parts of the churchyard.

We are already seeing evidence of an increase in the insect population in the churchyard, we were particularly excited by sightings of Speckled Wood Butterflies. A range of wildflowers have appeared including a beautiful display of bluebells in the spring, red campion, cow parsley, dandelions and many more. It's particularly good to see nettles growing as they are food for many species of the caterpillars of butterflies and moths. All these plants will help to encourage the insect population and the long grass itself supports some species of solitary bees.

It is noticeable that a number of other local churches are adopting similar strategies, no doubt driven both by the desire to encourage wildlife and the need to save money on maintaining their churchyards. If you want further information about enhancing the environment for wildlife you can visit the websites listed below.

[www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk](http://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk)

[www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk)