

Archdeacons' Briefing No 5 January 2010

This Archdeacons' briefing is concerned with the subject of wildlife in churchyards. It has been compiled by Janis Irvine, a Member of Newcastle Diocesan Environment Task Group, and her work on this project is acknowledged with thanks.

Parishes with churchyards need to be aware of the essential reference work, *The Churchyards' Handbook* (ed. Thomas Cocke, 4th edition, ISBN No: 9780715175835, available from Church House Publishing). This document sets the framework for managing a churchyard and is particularly useful in the way that it identifies legal and practical issues that need to be addressed by PCCs.

We would also draw your attention to the *Chancellor's regulations on Churchyard Memorials and the Care and Maintenance of Churchyards* and also the *Regulations on Trees in Churchyards*. Both of these documents are available for download from the Churchwardens' page of the Diocesan website <http://www.newcastle.anglican.org/people-and-places/churchwardens-page.aspx> and go to the section on 'Church and Churchyard'.

Each churchyard should have its own set of local regulations, consistent with the Chancellor's regulations but reflecting the particular circumstances of the local churchyard. Not only should these local regulations be made available to those thinking about erecting memorials and to monumental masons but they should also be posted clearly in the vicinity of each churchyard.

Also worth looking at is a news item on wildlife in churchyards on the Church of England website at <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/news/pr0110.html>. This contains further useful links.

Peter Robinson and Geoff Miller, January 2010

ENCOURAGING WILDLIFE IN THE CHURCHYARD

Churchyards and cemeteries feature in all the Local Biodiversity Action Plans for the North East, and are counted amongst the areas regarded as important habitats for wildlife. This gives added responsibility to those who share in the care of "God's Acre".

Wildlife in churchyards can cover any, or all, of the following:

* Trees * Grasses * Wildflowers * Lichens * Fungi * Birds * Bats * Insects * Amphibians and Reptiles * Small and Large Mammals

What can we do to encourage wildlife in our churchyards?

We can exercise a Ministry of Stewardship and Hospitality to the wildlife and to the people who use our churchyards. We are all connected.

The following notes may be helpful:

1. BIRDS:

- * Find out what you have already, then find out what you can do to encourage other species.
- * You can take part in the Big Garden Bird Watch (Winter and Summer).
- * You may have a member of the congregation who has a special interest in birds.
- * There may be a local RSPB or Wildlife Trust Group.
- * Your local school may welcome being involved in a churchyard bird survey.
- * Consider planting a range of shrubs that will provide shelter and food. In particular, consider British native species such as hawthorn, holly and dog rose.
- * Put up bird boxes to provide for a variety of species.

2. BEES:

Over the last seventy years many kinds of bumblebees have become increasingly scarce. Those species that have remained commonplace have been able to use gardens to provide part of their habitat.

By growing suitable plants and providing a haven for bumblebees in our churchyards, we can help safeguard future populations.

Pollen and nectar from many different garden plants are used by bumblebees to feed themselves and their young. To provide the perfect environment for bumblebees it is important to ensure that the flowering times of suitable plants cover the whole bumblebee season from March to August.

What we can do:

- * Plant a wildflower meadow including plants with long petal tubes such as red clover, bird's-foot-trefoil, vetches, scabious and knapweed.
- * Provide a variety of different plants to provide bumblebee food throughout the bumblebee season.
- * Leave rough grass, preferably against a hedge, to help provide nesting and hibernation sites.
- * Remember plants with single flowers are easier for bumblebees to get into!

Ideal plants for Bees:

Early Spring: berberis, bluebell, bugle, flowering currant, lungwort, pussy willow, rosemary, dead-nettle and heathers.

Early Summer: aquilegia, campanula, comfrey, foxglove, geranium, honeysuckle, rhododendron, stachys and thyme.

Late Summer: cornflower, delphinium, fuchsia, hebe, lavender, scabious and sea holly.

Consider planting a succession of shrubs to flower throughout the season, such as berberis, buddleia, ceanothus, cotoneaster, flowering currant, honeysuckle, rhododendron, rosemary, weigela.

3. LICHENS:

Lichens are all around us, on trees, wood, stone and even on the soil. In a churchyard they are most obvious on walls, roofs and of course on headstones.

What is a lichen?

Although it doesn't look like it, it is a type of fungus that has developed a way of living in very close association with algae.

Many are very beautiful if examined closely through a hand lens. They do little or no damage to the stones they grow on, and can protect them from chemical weathering.

Churchyards are important for several reasons. Each lichen has specific requirements of stone or tree type, aspect, slope, wind, damp, and shade or sun. Churchyards often include a great variety of these 'habitat niches'. As a result the diversity of lichens in a churchyard may be much higher than the surrounding area. A good churchyard will have more than 100 species of lichens, including some real rarities such as our local speciality, Rock Nail (*Calicium corynellum*).

Lichens need little encouragement; they will do well so long as we avoid harming them. They are easily damaged by the use of herbicides (incl. fungicides and algicides), by scraping or by chemicals used to reveal inscriptions. Moving stones or laying them flat generally kills the lichens, as does the increasing shade of maturing trees. Repairs to the church buildings, while very necessary, can have a devastating effect unless the lichens are taken into account when the work is planned.

Further information is available on the British Lichen Society website www.thebls.org.uk. Or contact Janet Simkin BLS Lichen Recorder for Northumberland Tel: 01661 823 233 e-mail; janetsimkin@btinternet.com and for any other churchyard inquiries.

4. TREES:

Most churchyards are home to a number of trees and these provide ideal habitats for wildlife. The Newcastle Diocesan *Regulations on Trees in Churchyards* should always be consulted before carrying out any tree work. Thereafter, advice can be obtained either from the Archdeacon or from the Diocesan Advisory Committee. Felling trees in churchyards is something that will always need care and you are advised to consult before taking any action. It is highly likely that permission will be required and PCCs need to realise that this is a legal requirement.

When selecting a species for planting in a churchyard always consider choosing a British native species as these carry the greatest number of insects. Native birch trees carry more insect species than any other species.

5. YEW:

Yews are often found in churchyards and can be many hundreds of years old. They require special management and advice should always be sought before trimming them or digging near them. Contact the following for help:

The Conservation Foundation, 1 Kensington Gore, London, SW7 2AR Tel: 0200 7591 3111
www.conservationfoundation.co.uk

Care and Management of Yews in Churchyards:

In the North, contact Paul Greenwood
Tel: 0191 2614 051
E-mail: yewtrees@btopenworld.com

or Ancient Yew Group www.ancient-yew.org

"..... A voluntary research project established in 1992 to raise awareness, protection and responsibility for this unique, ancient and sacred tree heritage especially in Northern Britain."

Excellent advice on trees, plants and animals in the churchyard is given in the handbook **"Wildlife in church and churchyard"** by Nigel Cooper

Published by Church House Publishing for the Council for the Care of Churches of the Church of England £9.95 ISBN 0-7151-7587-4

WILDFLOWER SEED:

When buying wildflower seed, make sure it is British-sourced. This can be guaranteed when you buy from:

Landlife Wildflowers Ltd, National Wildflower Centre, Court Hey Park, Liverpool L16 3NA
Tel: 0151 737 1819. www.wildflower.org.uk Send for their catalogue.

Or try: **Northumberland Wildflowers**

Tel: 01665 570 207. www.northumberlandwildflowers.com

FURTHER READING

“Attracting Wildlife to your Garden” (The Wildlife Trusts) J.A Burton & D. Tipling: Published by Silverdale Books / Bookmart Ltd 2005 £12.99 ISBN 184 509 163-9

“Creating Small Habitats for Wildlife in Your Garden” Josie Briggs: Pub. by Guild of Master Craftsman Publications Ltd 2000 £7 ISBN 1-86108-188-X

“How to Make a Wildlife Garden” Chris Baines: Pub. by Frances Lincoln Ltd 2000 £14.99 ISBN 0 7112 1711

“The Small Ecological Garden” Sue Strickland: Pub. by Search Press / HDRA 1996 £5.95 ISBN 0 85532773 1

“Wildflowers of Britain” (Over 1,000 species by photographic identification) Roger Phillips: Pub. by Pan Books 1977 ISBN 0 330 25183 X

“Wildlife in the Churchyard” Francesca Greenoak: Pub. By Little, Brown and Co. (UK) Ltd 1993 £12.99 ISBN 0 316 90499 6

In the foreword by Richard Mabey, he says “..... I hope the eloquent arguments in this book will hasten this process of reconciliation, for the challenge of ensuring that churchyards serve the diverse needs of a whole community — and that includes the needs of its wild creatures — is a microcosm of the environmental challenges that face us all. And it is a challenge, moreover in which the spiritual significance of nature is for once given its rightful place.”

Also: **“Creative Sustainable Gardening”** Diana Anthony: Pub. By Centre for Alternative Technology 2000 £12.99 ISBN 1 89804 923 8

For further information, contact:

Janet Simkin: telephone 01661 823 233; e-mail janetsimkin@btinternet.com

Janis Irvine (Member of the Environment Task Group): telephone 01434 673 609; e-mail david@irvine4.plus.com

God of all Creation,

We pray and give thanks for all life:

For insects, birds and animals,

amongst whom we count ourselves;

For trees, shrubs and flowers;

For grasses, ferns and fungi;

For fruits and for vegetables, and all other plant life.

God of all Creation,

We pray and give thanks for a place for all life:

For high mountains and fertile valleys;
For meadow grasslands and desert plains;
For sand dunes, shorelines, steep cliffs
 and rocky outcrops;
For deep flowing rivers and tumbling becks;
For hidden caves, for flood plains and river beds;
For high tarns and misty waterfalls;
For island-studded sea lochs and quiet waterways;
For peat bogs, reed beds and marshland;
For upland heather moors
 and wind-swept scrubby places
For hedgerows, shelterbelts and coppices;
For ancient woodlands and vast mighty forests,
For all managed places —
 and, in particular, for all wild places.

God of all Creation,

As we recognise our failings
and acknowledge how much has already been lost,
Grant us the wisdom to fully appreciate,
and never to lose our awe and wonder for,
the Earth's infinite variety of wildlife and habitats.
Help each of us at all times to be good stewards
 of this beautiful but fragile Earth.

Amen

(Prayer by Janis Irvine 2009)