

The Chiseldon Gardening & Countryside Club has happily worked with the Chiseldon Parish Council on three projects over the past year. Each was designed to benefit wildlife as well as to be aesthetically pleasing. In March 2020, the Meadow Project was started on a 45 metre stretch at the back of the grass verge along New Road behind and to the left of the Christmas tree site. After an initial mow, the turf was cut by Peter Bracey then 10 club members turned the sods over before seeding the area with an assortment of meadow flowers. Unfortunately the success of this project in its first year was greatly affected by two factors. The first lockdown due to Covid-19 restricted movement but worse than that perhaps was the lack of moisture. During April, two members took three water cans up every other evening but, with such a large area, it was virtually impossible to cover the entire length. During the month May, the total rainfall was less than 4 mm. Later in the summer however, there were a few little patches of colour but nothing as spectacular as it should have been. The most notable flowering plants were two species of Clarkia, Californian poppy, Calendula and some mustard family varieties. The club plans to plant up plugs of Californian poppy, Godetia, columbine and a few other species this spring, but even now, there is little or no rain in the immediate forecast so it is not looking too favourable for a colourful display this year either.

The Wildflower Project is still in its early stages and this is located on the lower left of Stroud's Hill green. In 2020, after one initial mow, the area was left to grow naturally to benefit wildlife and the plants were monitored to see what would flower. Although grasses predominated, there were a few interesting species but, more importantly, it was very evident that a wide range of insects really did benefit in that area. Following regular inspections, there were many more solitary bees, moths, butterflies, various beetles and an assortment of flies in the project area compared with out on the regularly mown green. Earlier this spring, two members planted out 40 plugs of cowslips and five forget-me-nots as well as sowing a mix of wildflowers to include vetch, field daisies, red poppies, cornflowers and other species. Again, this area will be closely monitored.

The third and most recent project is in the Millennium Copse. This came about following the major repair work carried out by SSE when a fairly extensive area was left barren towards the end of the copse near the farm shop. During a Zoom meeting with the Parish Council, Tony (the Club's Chair) suggested that, rather than wildflowers, the area could be planted with bluebells and a selection of shrubs to benefit wildlife as well as to look attractive. At a later meeting, the Parish Council agreed to fund the project if the Gardening Club would suggest suitable shrubs, place the order and handle much of the groundwork. This was all agreed. Towards the end of November, three club members and Clair planted out 1,000 bluebell bulbs after Karen had kindly brought up her rotavator to break up the ground. In December, five club members gathered, socially distant of course, to plant out the 45 purchased bareroot shrubs (Snowberry, Dogwood and Cotoneaster) as well as a dozen wild shrubs which had been donated by club member Lynne together with 15 Pheasant Berry shrubs and 15 Carex plants donated by Tony and his wife. Following recent visits to Millennium Copse, most of the shrubs are breaking nicely and the bluebell leaves are peeping through. There is evidence that deer have been grazing on the Carex and probably rabbits have nibbled a few of the low shrubs, but it is hoped that the area will soon begins to look more attractive.

Finally, since we hope that later this year life may return to a more normal pattern, the Chiseldon Gardening & Countryside Club would like to invite anyone who would like information or be interested in joining the club to contact Tony Henderson (Chair) on 01672 841444 or Richard Matthews (Secretary) on 01793 740022. You don't have to be a gardening expert to belong as most of our members just enjoy their gardens and see the evening as a social event. The club plan to hold meetings, when permitted, at 7:30 pm on the second Wednesday of each month in the Holy Cross Church Hall just off Butts Road. The speaker's topics range from those related to gardening as well as to broader aspects of the countryside and wildlife and tea, coffee and homemade cake are served afterwards. Also, the club usually plans up to three outdoor visits a year to local gardens or places of interest and some of these include an introductory talk or a guided tour.

Respectfully submitted by Wendy Forster