

# The Hurst Water Meadow

Dorchester on Thames, Oxfordshire  
*Owned and managed on behalf of local people*  
*Charity Number 1050272*



## Hurst water meadow news

**August 2006**

### **Defra Environmental Stewardship**

The Trust has been very fortunate in being awarded ten years of grants under the Defra Higher Level scheme. This is very good news, as it is competitive, and if unsuccessful, we would have been short of money for essential expenses and meadow maintenance.

However, in return we have to improve the variety of the meadow's wild flowers. The Defra advisers approve of the wild flower seeding in the bottom field west of the public footpath and the planting of wild flowers in the scrape by local school children. To increase the spread of wild flowers, we will have to do more widespread seeding in other parts of the meadow. This is difficult in old meadows, particularly when coarse grasses are present. In the 10 years that the trustees have been managing the meadow, more coarse grass has appeared, and the diversity of wild flowers has, if anything, become less. This is partly due to lack of regular grazing with cattle, as we cannot find suitable herds.

One method for spreading wild flowers is 'slot seeding' using a machine that cuts a thin opening in the turf and inserts the seed: another is to rotavate and seed as in the bottom field. The area to be seeded is cut first and rolled afterwards. We plan to seed three hectares of the seven-hectare meadow, starting in early September. There will be little disturbance of the meadow nor inconvenience to the public.

Seeding in two successive years is planned, at a cost of around £5,000 a year. It will not be possible to obtain outside funding for this year, but individual trustees have offered to cover the first year's costs and donations would be welcome. A wider range of wild flowers is helpful to birds, bees, butterflies and many other organisms, some of which are essential pollinators, quite apart from the beauty of a meadow rich in wild flowers. The trustees will do their best, with the support of the public, to improve the meadow and maintain public access to this beautiful site as a resource for recreation, education and an inspiration for all.

### **Visits by school children and other groups**

The Defra grant offers encouragement for schools and other groups to visit the meadow. We have made an 'open-air classroom' near the gate and produced a comprehensive Teachers' Information Pack for schools and other interested groups. It can also be seen on our website which now contains much new educational material. We are working closely with Dorchester Abbey, as a guided visit to the Abbey, the Museum and the Hurst meadow is very attractive.

## **Scrape, wild flower planting and raised track project.**

This project is now complete. An opening event was held on 3 August. The Trust Chairman presided and invited Philippa Lyons a director of Waste Recycling Environmental Ltd (and Director of the BBOWT wildlife trust) to open the raised track and footpath. WREN were the main source of funds through the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme (now renamed the Landfill Community Fund). The Oxfordshire County Council also contributed substantially.

Fiona Danks, administrator of the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment, (another major source of Landfill Tax funds) and author of 'Nature's Playground' then opened the scrape planted with 400 wild flowers, jointly with Tom Bailey, one of the children from Dorchester Primary School who had planted the wild flowers. He cut the tape to much applause. It was a happy occasion, ending with refreshments provided by volunteers. This joint project was favourably mentioned in the school's Ofsted report and has been shortlisted for an Oxfordshire Sustainability and Conservation Award (OSCA) to be decided on 19 October.

## **Other news**

The hay was cut on 18 July and turned, baled and removed on 20 July by Jeremy Hitchcox. The meadow has been visited about 17,000 times by members of the public in the past eight months. The County Council plan to replace the stiles at the Overy end of the public footpath with kissing gates. Comments and suggestions welcome.

Peter Pritchard, Hon. secretary

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