

## **Progress of the Wild Flower Meadows in Coopers Field 2013**

Our first attempt at creating a flower meadow has so far had been a huge success. There has been much interest from others on how well the project is doing. It was most appreciated that everyone kept their dogs under control and not walked on the area.

The yellow rattle will provide enough seed to enlarge the area or seed another area on the site. Nick Gray, from the Dorset Wildlife Trust, has been advising us on the next steps to take, to ensure we are able to increase the wild flowers in the meadow next year.

Much to our relief the intense mowing and sowing of yellow rattle has actually increased the number of orchids growing in this area. A very positive sign that we are getting things right.

In February / March the area was cut just before the yellow rattle was starting to come through.

In April Cathy and Chris visited the site with Nick Gray from Dorset Wildlife Trust and there was a great sigh of relief when he pointed out to them that the yellow rattle plants were just starting to grow. They were only about half an inch high but at least now we knew what we were looking for! We had thought that the seed had either drowned or been washed away due to the heavy rain at the end of last year /beginning of this year.

By the end of May the yellow rattle was in flower and had grown to about 2 ins. With the warm weather the plants flourished and once the flowers finished the seed heads started to form. It soon became clear why it is called yellow rattle – when the wind blows the seeds rattle in the seed heads. We had wrongly assumed that the plants would grow quite tall which would have made collecting the seed much easier. However, they only grow to about 2 ft. so there were a few aching backs once we started collecting the seed.

It was a lovely surprise to see not only the yellow rattle growing, but 5 orchids, as well as clover, cats' ears, buttercups and various grasses and to see a variety of butterflies and moths enjoying the habitat. A lot of the yellow rattle seed will reseed itself in the area and come up next year. However, we started collecting some of the seed in July and collected 1.5 kilos. The seed was stored in the fridge, ready to sow in the autumn in the new wildflower meadow area, which we are going to create in the centre of Coopers Field in the shape of a tree.

We had also been raising wildflower plants from seed, which people had donated, to help get the original area established with flowers. We would also sow wildflower seeds there in the autumn. Nick Gray will advise us on the type of flowers that would grow naturally in this habitat. However, before all this happens the grass will need to be cut with a scythe and then raked over to disperse any seeds left in the grass. So, in August/September the process of cutting the grass and raking was started on the new area in preparation for sowing the yellow rattle seed in October 2013.

In October 2013 400g of basic, general purpose wildflower seed which consisted of yarrow, common knapweed, lady's bedstraw, oxeye daisy, ribwort plantain, salad burnet, meadow buttercup, sorrel, red campion, bladder campion and wild red clover, and 30g each of betony/field scabious and birdsfoot trefoil was sown in the first wildflower meadow. Unfortunately, in our naivety, we had not realised that some of these flowers were perennial so would not flower the first year. What a disappointment.