

Overview of Bleasby Grasshoppers volunteer group activities 2023/2024

Bleasby Green Spaces Group (BGSM) was set up a couple of years ago to better understand and capture existing knowledge of the various practices/tasks associated with managing the greenspaces owned by the parish. These greenspaces not only provide us with pleasant places to enjoy but they are also important habitats for wildlife, wildflowers, hedgerows, and native trees. The intention being to provide Bleasby Parish Council (BPC) and the community with a sustainable plan to manage these greenspaces, not only in their present form, but to enhance and develop them for a sustainable future.

The Grasshoppers volunteering group, which emerged from the development of the plan, are now an established group of volunteers who share a passion for looking after the wonderful green spaces on our doorstep. Complete management of the green spaces was always deemed to be far beyond the scope of the group and as such BPC now also employs 2 contactors, Ulyetts and Green Oak Gardening Services, to carry out the routine and labour-intensive tasks such as grass cutting and hedge management. This has allowed the Grasshopper volunteers to focus on specific conservation and restorative projects that enhance our green spaces in ways that improve flora and fauna as well as making them more enjoyable for community use.

Some of the routine maintenance activities undertaken by the Grasshoppers this year include:

- Ferry End - Installation of the new benches provided by the Parish Council. Routine grass cut and tidy.
- Restoration of the Glebe Field Orchard - mown, trees pruned where appropriate, hedge trimmed.
- Jubilee Ponds (JP):
 - paths through meadow and Centenary Wood were mown and maintained.
 - Perimeter paths mown and pinch points cleared of brambles (moving forward, this activity will be undertaken by contractors due to the time and energy commitment required).
 - Maintained and improved den building area – including the creation of a dead hedge around the perimeter and installation of several bird boxes.
 - Removal & tidy up of various small trees/branches that had fallen at JP etc.
- Tidied and maintained the patch at the train station
- Oversaw planting & care of a number of new trees throughout the village & ensured that trees were kept watered during the drier spells. These included the Glebe field Christmas tree & Jubilee Oak, 7 x fastigiate hornbeams and the Wild Service tree

Alongside the routine upkeep of our Green Spaces, the Grasshoppers are undertaking a number of projects focussed on enhancing these spaces, that we hope will encourage an increase in the diversity and population of wildlife and flora. In the last 12 months, these projects have included:

Creation of “Coronation Corner Meadow” in the wet corner of Glebe field behind and around the large oak. We simply left the grass uncut last year in order to see what plant species were already present - unsurprisingly this was predominantly grass but a total of 24 different species of plant were identified, the greatest variety being at the margins and in the miry areas of the meadow. In late Aug, the meadow was scythed and arisings removed and during this work party, large numbers of insects along with frogs, toads and a vole were observed in this small area of meadow. Further maintenance was undertaken during the latest working party, including the introduction of yellow rattle plugs which will help to reduce the vigour of problematic plants and will ultimately allow the wildflowers to flourish.

Fruit trees at JP: BPC agreed to the purchase of 7 fruit trees, to be planted at JP, and a selection of different fruit trees have now been purchased and planted. The trees chosen will provide an extended

period of blossom in the spring and a variety of fruit in the autumn. Not only will this improve the aesthetic of this area it will also increase biodiversity and provide a source of fruit for parishioners.

Bleasby Swift Box scheme: This is an initiative to provide more nesting sites for visiting swifts, partnering with similar groups in Southwell and Farnsfield and involving Notts Wildlife Trust. Grasshoppers have been co-ordinating an effort to encourage Bleasby residents to install swift boxes on their homes. There has been a lot of interest and 20 boxes have been distributed to those who have requested them. Members of the Grasshoppers helped to install many of these boxes.

Amphibian/reptile mats were laid around the periphery of the main meadow at JP earlier this year: these will provide further habitat and allow surveys to be done on the local population. They are already proving to be successful as common lizards have been found sheltering under them - the first time this species has been recorded at JP.

Projects planned for 2024/25 include: the enhancement of the entrance area and signage around Jubilee Ponds and the improvement of some of the neglected habitat such as the Reed beds. The BGSM Plan outlines a number of additional, projects for future implementation.

Events

And it's not just about the working parties.... In Oct, with the support of the BPC, the Grasshoppers were instrumental in organizing a very successful Nature Day at Jubilee Ponds. Families from the parish came together to help build a giant bug hotel at Jubilee Ponds and in addition to this:

- Participants constructed around 30 bird boxes from pre-prepared templates along with a number of mini-bug hotels to take home to their own gardens.
- A team of birding experts helped introduce visitors to the ornithology of Jubilee Ponds
- A bat walk was organised during the evening and at least 6 different species of bats were detected at Jubilee Ponds and the field behind St Marys.

Building on the success of this event, the Grasshoppers are planning to hold additional seasonal events in this year, the next of which will be held on Sunday 12 May 2 – 4pm. The focus of this event will be:

- Learning about some of the different bees in our village
- Making solitary bee hotels to take home
- 'How to build a mini pond for your garden' show & tell

We're also hoping to hold:

- Additional bat walks throughout the year
- A July summer event focusing on the wildflowers, butterflies, dragonflies and moths of JP meadow
- An autumn harvest event showcasing locally grown and harvested produce
- A winter wreath making session

We're also keen to strengthen links between Grasshoppers and Bleasby school and are looking forward to collaborating with Bleasby school on their inquiry this term.

Grasshoppers have recently welcomed several new families bringing the current Grasshopper count to 37.

We meet on the morning of the 3rd Sat of each month, & there are also add-hoc gatherings to deal with things as and when they arise. Communication is via a Group WhatsApp - we will put a shout out in the week leading up to a work party session and based on the number of people who can make it and the weather we fine tune a plan for the upcoming session. There is no expectation of committing to the work parties as we all lead busy lives. We usually have an end of year get together to discuss projects and future plans – last years social was a Mulled Wine and Christmas Wreath making session which was kindly hosted at St Marys Church.

If you are interested in helping out, meeting new friends and old, having some fun and getting some exercise, please get in touch to find out more.

Additional info:

Scheduled Grasshopper working parties: 3rd Sat of each month - 10am - 12pm. All Bleasby residents welcome.

Contact details:

Community website: www.bleasbycommunity.uk > Volunteering Groups > Bleasby Grasshoppers

or contact Jo Dunseath or Mike Fryer on bleasbygrasshoppers@outlook.com

List of fruit trees planted at JP:

- Apple - Blenheim Orange, M106 rootstock
- Apple - Greensleeves, M106 rootstock
- Crab Apple - Butterball, M106 rootstock
- Pear - Concorde, Quince A rootstock
- Quince - Meeches Prolific, Quince A rootstock
- Plum - Czar, St Julien rootstock
- Damson - Merryweather, St Julien rootstock

Bleasby Swift Boxes

If you are interested in providing a site next year, please get in touch with Mike Fryer. General information can be found on the swift conservation website www.swift-conservation.org.