



News from the Marlborough Downs

Harvest has come early this year, and with all the gorgeous weather we've had it's hard to believe that the schools haven't even broken up yet and for most people it's the beginning of summer rather than the end! Obviously, it's a busy time of the farming year so there's not quite as much going on in terms of events at the moment. However, we've had a successful programme so far and are planning lots for the autumn and winter months.

We are very pleased to have designed and launched our new [website](#), so please take a look at it and let us know what you think! There is a wealth of information on the site which should keep you busy for hours! You can now also book our events online by clicking the [Eventbrite](#) link.

Alongside the new website, we continue to post news, photos and information about all our upcoming events on our [facebook page](#). You don't need a facebook account to keep an eye on it, so make sure you don't miss anything - there is even a webcam link to a nestbox via which we have had the pleasure of watching a pair of barn owls raise their young live on camera!

In the meantime, scroll down for news of:

- Wildflowers
 - Bees
 - Rockley Tree Sparrow Corridor
 - Rights of Way
 - Events
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Wildflower update

The Marlborough Downs are blooming lovely! Two farm walks, one on Weir Farm and one on the Rockley Estate, demonstrated exactly that, with an abundance of wildflower species and all the bees and butterflies and other bugs that thrive in such a diverse habitat. Download our [pocket guide](#) to some of the more common grassland plants and see how many you can tick off this summer.



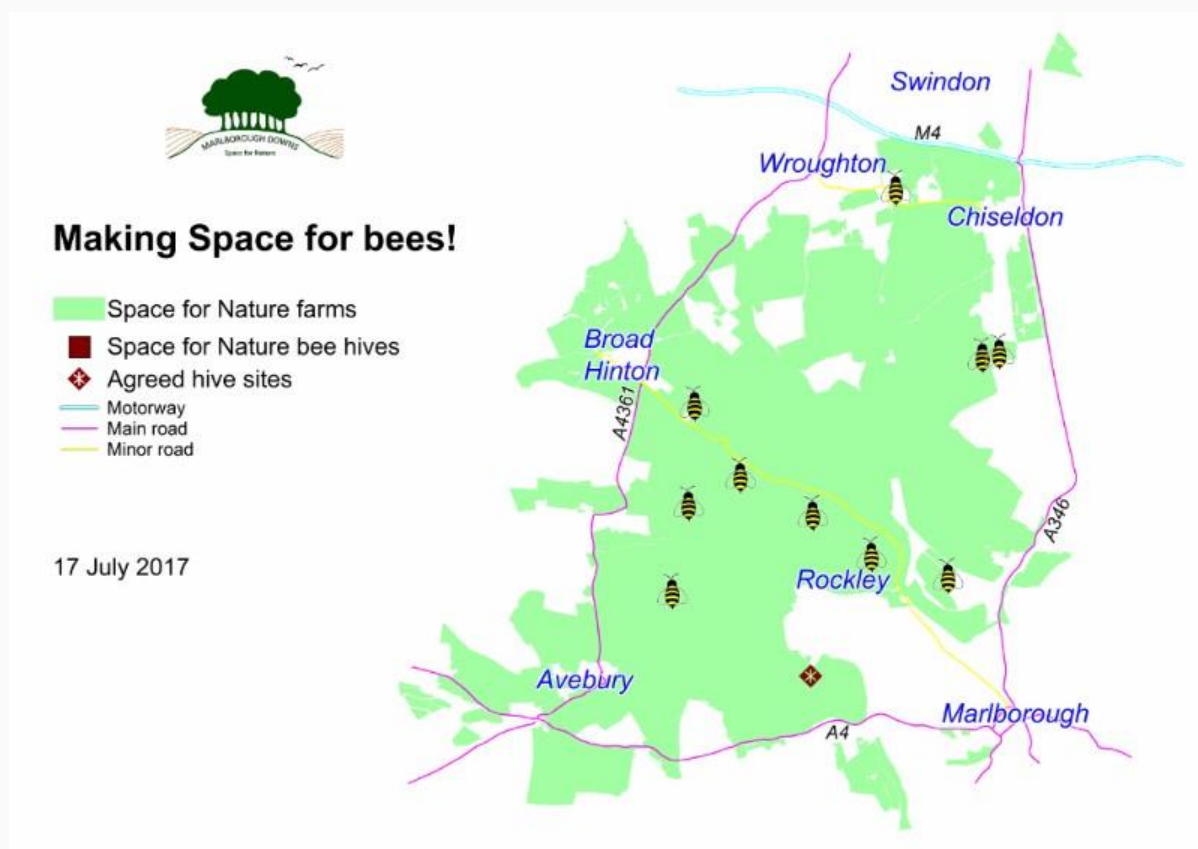
These wildflowers on the Rockley Manor Estate were introduced as seed into some very boring grassland back in 2013 - what a spectacular result in just four years!

Bees on the Marlborough Downs

Bees are an important group and have been a feature in the wild landscape for millions of years. On the Marlborough Downs, we have successfully integrated bees throughout many of our farms (see map below).

Bees are a valuable commodity. They will not only assist with the pollination of crops, but are also available to pollinate wild plants when other pollinator populations are low. Thus, managed honey bees may improve wild pollination, which in turn will attract more birds and other wildlife, and over time the plants themselves will respond by producing more flowers, and seeds will be spread by the animals that feed on them.

Honeybees will regularly forage at a distance of 2 to 3 miles from their hive and each individual bee may visit 50 to 100 flowers on a single expedition, and up to 2 million in her lifetime. Each hive may have many thousand bees working at any one time, so that's a lot of flowers!



We're working on a new webpage to tell the story of our bees, so keep an eye on the Space for Nature website for further information.

The Great Rockley Tree Sparrow Corridor

Earlier this year we completed the mammoth task of linking the Rockley Tree Sparrow Village with a nectar plot on Temple Farm, a dew pond on Rockley Manor Estate, and a shelter belt on Manton Estate. This involved planting a 900 metre corridor comprising a double staggered row of shrubs, supported by bamboo canes and protected with spirals – around 4,500 individual units, each one put in by a volunteer!

The shrub species were specially selected to provide shelter (hawthorn and blackthorn) and snacks for tree sparrows and other birds (guelder rose, wayfaring tree, spindle, wild privet,

dogwood), and mammals (hazel). Many of these also have flowers that are attractive to insects, which are not only important as chick food but also in their own right as pollinators. We used a similar combination of species when we planted the original Village so in time, the corridor will seem to the birds just an extension to their home territory, and so become a very safe and familiar way to travel across the landscape.



As well as being an important wildlife habitat, the corridor brings added value to the environment. Partly paid for by Cardwave Services Ltd., a Devizes based business, the project has been used to offset two years of carbon usage by the company. This is possible because trees (and shrubs) contribute to carbon sequestration (storage). Trees and hedgerows are very important in this context as they are long-lived and therefore store their carbon for many years.

Due to the rolling nature of the Downland in this area, run-off and soil erosion are always something to be aware of. There have been issues with soil and water running off the land, onto the road, and down into ditches and a winterbourne. As it grows up, the corridor will start to slow and filter this run-off and help prevent the movement of soil and water from field to road to stream.

Furthermore, when the corridor matures it will form a living obstacle between Rockley Manor Farm, which is organic, and Temple Farm which is part organic (grass) and part conventionally managed (arable). This means that pesticides and fertilisers used on Temple Farm arable land are less likely to find their way accidentally onto Rockley's organic grassland.

So all in all, a truly multi-purpose landscape feature which will in years to come fulfil important roles in enhancing the environment on the Downs, thanks to the hard work of all the volunteers who gave up their Saturdays to plant the Great Rockley Tree Sparrow Corridor!

One of the volunteers had a drone and sent us a video showing the full length of the corridor - take a look and you'll appreciate the true extent of our efforts! (Click on the link below and scroll down to the bottom of the page.)

[Visit our website to view video](#)

Mammal of the Season - The Harvest Mouse

The tiny harvest mouse lives in long tussocky grassland, reedbeds, hedgerows and around woodland edges. They build spherical nests of tightly woven grass, at about knee height amongst the tall grasses. (That's a human knee, not a harvest mouse one!) They are mainly vegetarian, eating seeds and fruits, but will also snack on invertebrates.

The harvest mouse has pale ginger or yellow fur and a white belly. Its tail is almost hairless and nearly as long as its body.



The loss of field margins, hedgerows and grassland habitats is a threat to this species, but we're pleased to report that these cute little critters are living quietly all over the Marlborough Downs. Although there are no 'official' records of harvest mice in the area since the 1940s, this seems to be a factor of under-reporting rather than extinction - at a December workshop a group of us found 13 nests in one field in an hour!

We are planning another workshop later in the year to show you how you can help to map harvest mouse distribution across the Downs, so keep an eye on our [events page](#) for more details.

Public Rights of Way

With the recent lovely weather, more people are out and about in the countryside, which is great news! However, with rights come responsibilities, so make sure you know the score by downloading our [handy guide](#) to the Do's and Don'ts on Rights of Way. There's also lots more information on how to enjoy the great outdoors in the [Countryside Code](#).

Upcoming events

Please visit the events page on our [website](#) for details of all upcoming events and to book. If there is something you'd like us to organise do get in touch, especially if it's something you'd be willing to host yourself.



Butterfly Walk

23 July 11:00 am

Join the Marlborough Downs farmers and Butterfly Conservation on an easy ramble around the ramparts of Barbury Castle and learn about butterflies and how to identify them.



Bat Walk, Avebury

2 September 7:15 pm

Join the Marlborough Downs Nature Enhancement Partnership and the National Trust at their mystical Avebury stone circle to learn more about these magical animals. Bat detectors provided, bring a torch.



Bat Walk, Rockley

15 September 7:15 pm

Another chance to find out about different species of bat and their habitats. Bat detectors provided, bring a torch. (Photo (c) Hugh Clark)

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