

Rock Edge Nature Reserve Headington, Oxford

Update 2014 - Judy Webb's report on meeting at Rock Edge on 2 August 2014

All photos taken by Judy Webb

“The best result from last year's sowings was a good amount of Yellow Rattle, [Rhinanthus minor](#), everywhere. More was distributed this year. Most of the other plants take two years to be big enough to flower, so will not be seen until next year.

The most spectacular find of the meeting was a plant of the Clustered Bellflower, [Campanula glomerata](#) (photo on right).

The [Long-winged Conehead](#) was impressive”.



To see photos taken by Judy on 2 August 2014, click [here](#)

2013 Seed from Milham Ford Nature Park spread at Rock Edge



Seed collected by volunteers from Milham Ford Nature Park on 29 July 2013 was spread at [Rock Edge](#) Local Nature Reserve, which is a [Geological SSSI](#), although its wildlife has not yet been given any protective designation. Judy Webb reported:

“Yesterday evening [Saturday, 3 August 2013], 14 locals including 3 children and a lady who got out of her wheelchair and hobbled round on crutches helped spread Milham seed at Rock Edge relic limestone grassland. They added seeds of yellow rattle, meadow cranesbill, bird's foot trefoil, musk mallow,

cowslip and black knapweed. All these are from a local source and appropriate to the soil. This will increase the flowers available as nectar and pollen source for bees and butterflies next year. The grassland will be more attractive too.

Bird's foot trefoil is the food plant of the caterpillar of the common blue butterfly and the 6-spot burnet moth. Yellow rattle should reduce the strength of the rank grass as it is a hemiparasite, joining its roots with the grass to remove water and sugars. With grass less dominant, the smaller wildflowers have more of a chance to succeed. Most of these flowers would have been present in the past, before housing development enveloped the site and grazing ceased.



Rock Edge volunteers also collected seed from flowers already growing on the site - field scabious, small scabious and greater knapweed - and spread it over other areas.

Scabious flowers are particularly important for the rare **Scabious Bee**, *Andrena hattorfiana* (pictured left on Field Scabious), seen at the site a few years ago.

This is a large ground-nesting solitary bee, resembling a honey bee, that feeds only on scabious flowers and is classed as 'Nationally Scarce'.



Also present here is the attractive little **Scabious Moth**, *Nemophora metallica*, (pictured left), which breeds in scabious flowerheads.

The greater knapweed on site was seen to be covered with bumble bees at the time, so having more scabious flowers here will certainly help bumble bee populations. Although there is already a lot of red clover on the site, this has now all finished flowering.

Seed from the one patch of rest harrow was collected for propagation in pots, so that plant can be introduced to other parts of the site.

Last year the site was cut for hay in June, which was far too early, as none of the flowers had opened and set seed. This year a more wildlife-helpful cutting regime is in operation: an early cut of the rank grass areas, which have no flowers, with the flowery areas left long to allow seed-setting and insect life cycles to complete. Later in the autumn, when all seeding has finished, the remaining long vegetation will be cut and the hay removed. The creation of bare areas will help seeds to germinate and seedlings to grow next spring.

