

# *Cornfield Flowers Project*



## **Annual Newsletter – November 2012**

### **Chris Wilson, Project Officer:**

This update is intended as a “Thank You” to all our volunteers and farmers who have helped the Project in the past, and who wish to continue to grow plants or provide land for us in the future. Many of you will find that I am repeating things that you already know; we do however continue to attract new volunteers and farmers who would like to know something of our past years.

### ***Our story to date...***

The Cornfield Flowers Project was first set-up in the late 1990's by the Carstairs Countryside Trust, Ryedale Folk Museum, North York Moors National Park Authority and a group of volunteers. For the first five years the Project was run by these groups. In 2005 funding was obtained from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the National Park's Sustainable Development Fund. I was appointed Co-ordinator and over the next five years more farmers and volunteers joined us and we continued with our growing, planting and surveying. Our funding ran out on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2009 and the CFP was kept in suspended animation for a few months. In practice this meant that the plants kept growing, but the paperwork did not get done.

However, new funding was soon successfully secured from the North York Moors Sustainable Development Fund, LEADER and Heritage Lottery Fund, and in April 2010 two Project Officers were appointed for the next five years - Tom Normandale and myself - and included a new partner, the North Yorkshire Moors Association.

### ***Successes and rarities***

Over the ten years that the Project has been running, we usually manage to ‘re-find’ one new species a year. By new I mean something that has not been seen by local botanists for 20 years or so and is obviously becoming locally endangered. These plants do not appear at regular intervals - much like the proverbial bus they seem to come in groups or not at all. 2007 was a particularly good year, when Basil thyme, Field pepperwort, Small-flowered buttercup and Annual knawel all came along together.



**Small-flowered buttercup –  
introduction at Spaunton Quarry**



**Annual knawel, Birkdale Farm, Terrington**



**Dense-flowered fumitory – Rosemount Farm, Weaverthorpe**

In 2009 the 'new' plant was Dense-flowered fumitory, also found on a second site in 2010 along with Corn parsley, which produced enough seed in 2010 for us to attempt to grow it on.

The plants that we first started work on are now fairly secure on several sites and producing spontaneous plants. Corn buttercup has gone from us gathering 32 seeds in 1999 to having several hundred seeds from the year 2000 onwards and being able to place over two-thousand seeds in the Millennium Seed Bank in 2008. The Red hemp-nettle increased from 13 seeds in 2003 to being introduced to several sites between 2003 and 2010. Now it produces spontaneous plants on six sites, the most important of these being the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust site at Wharram Quarry, and the most unusual site being Stephen & Joceline Gibson's vegetable garden at Birkdale Farm. Once again, 2000 seeds of Red hemp-nettle were placed in the Millennium Seed Bank in 2008.

In 2009 Mousetail turned up, technically just outside our area at East Cottingwith Ings. We manage to grow it every year for display at the Ryedale Folk Museum, but it is such a specialist we have made no attempt to introduce it anywhere except to give plants to those of our co-operating farmers who are interested in growing it.

### ***Pioneer habitat***

After three years of introducing plants to Spaunton Quarry, it is obvious that our cornfield annuals are going to struggle in conditions where the nitrogen content of the soil is very low. However, all the legumes we have introduced are now producing spontaneous plants, so over the years nitrogen levels will rise. Kidney vetch, Restharrow and the locally rare Bithynian vetch have all done particularly well. Greater knapweed and Ox-eye daisy seem to thrive in these infertile conditions. Basil Thyme, Common calamint and Spring cinquefoil all managed to overwinter, and may now be established.



**Basil thyme – introduction at Spaunton Quarry**

The necessity for the rabbit-proof fence is now obvious - some of our plants have established outside the compound but they rarely produce flower heads due to being nipped-off. Only Viper's bugloss seems to be able to defeat the intense rabbit grazing.

### ***You keep us growing***

Many thanks to all of you who grew plants for us last year. They were used mainly to supplement the plants growing at our Silpho Field and were badly needed as we suffered vicious slug attacks, which took out nearly all of our spontaneous Corn marigolds and Cornflowers. The slug onslaught was followed by Hares nibbling-off some of our plants. However, I don't suppose some of you would mind us using your plants to feed Hares...

Because you are nearly all gardeners, you will be aware of what a difficult year it has been for growing plants. In 12 years of the CFP's history, 2012 was the first year we did not have to water a single plant. It seems strange that during 2010 & 2011 most of our plant losses were due to drought, and nearly all our plants that established then did so as a result of diligent watering.

### ***Promoting our aims***

This year our main promotion event was at Silpho on the 27<sup>th</sup> June from where, after showing those present our arable plants, meadow and nectar strips we went down to The Grainary, Harwood Dale, to see John Simpson's cornfield flowers strip. We then went back up to Silpho with those who could not attend during the afternoon. Amazingly, it stayed dry all day.

We also helped play host to a small group from Wharfedale Naturalists who visited the Gibson' at Birkdale Farm, Terrington and the Middlewoods at Glebe Farm, Potter Brompton. We will always make ourselves available for conducting small, interested parties around any of the sites we work on. All you have to do is get together one or two cars and people interested in our native plants and the conservation thereof, and contact ourselves so we can meet at one of the sites of interest, and pick a fine day.



**Silpho Field nectar strip – June 2012**

## ***Current events***

Some of you will be aware that we have not had use of the demonstration Cornfield at the Ryedale Folk Museum this year, and this is set to continue into 2013. Also, the nursery beds are to be moved further down the site.

The loss of the cornfield meant we did not have any volunteer days at the Museum this year. On top of this, Julia Lockwood, our long-standing volunteer and organiser from Saltburn has since removed herself to Bournemouth. Julia will be greatly missed. Is there anyone in the Cleveland area who would like to do her job..?

## **Tom Normandale, Project Officer:**

### ***Photographic exhibition***

One of the most significant achievements for the Project this year has been the hosting of our photographic exhibition at Kew's Millennium Seedbank at Wakehurst Place, West Sussex, in recognition of our work. The Millennium Seedbank conserves seed from rare plant species across the globe, acting as a safeguard against extinctions, and holds stocks for 90% of UK plant species. As a complementary project acting to conserve local flora that has deposited seed from a number of rare species at the MSB, we presented our story and images of the plants we work with to a national audience throughout the summer.

The exhibition is now available in a number of formats for local display. Should anyone have an interest in hosting it, please contact us.



**CFP Photographic Exhibition on display at Kew's Millennium Seed Bank**

## ***Community focus***

Over the last year or so we have attended numerous talks, events, village shows and gardening fairs to promote arable plant conservation in north-east Yorkshire, and it is pleasing to see that support for the Project from local communities continues to grow, as detailed below.

## ***Schools***

A number of schools are now working with us in hosting cornfield beds, and the staff and pupils are producing great results. Hinderwell Community Primary School have become the latest to join us, having just sown their new bed with a mix of rare species and shall hopefully see their first results next summer.

Esk Dale School at Whitby, Kirkbymoorside Primary School and Hunmanby Primary School have also got involved in the past year. Despite the challenging weather conditions, they have managed to produce good quantities of seed. Hunmanby School in particular provided us with an invaluable source of Corn marigold and Cornflower seeds, both species that have struggled this year like never before. Esk Dale School also appear to have become very proficient at growing Bithynian vetch – one of the non-arable rare plants we work to conserve - which is fitting as the only known native site in north-east Yorkshire for this nationally vulnerable plant is on the coast at Whitby.

Sowerby Primary School and Filey Secondary school continue to support cornfield beds, and have had their second and third years of flowering respectively. It is hoped these beds will be more or less self-sustaining for next year's season.

Thank you to all those who have supported these cornfield beds, and also to the Year 1 to 6 pupils of Hunmanby Primary School who recently did a sterling job planting up their own seed trays, in spite of having to endure a talk from me on the subject first.....

## ***Species Custodians***

We've had our first full year operating this scheme, and have been receiving seed from those lucky enough to have had some success. Again, it's been a very difficult year for propagating plants and the majority of our custodians have struggled to get anything of interest to rear its head. No doubt their discarded compost will have a profusion of plants sprouting from it next year, in somewhat typical style for these flowers – they like to show us who's really in charge every now and again. Of particular note though was Natasha Hambly, who had successes with Corn marigold, and most significantly Night-flowering catchfly. It's the first time this plant has been successfully propagated 'ex-situ' for the Project, and is quite an achievement for which we are grateful to Natasha and the seed she passed on from these.

We are continuing to expand this area of our work and have recently gained some new growers, so if you'd like to become involved or know someone who may be interested, please feel free to contact me.

## ***Cornfield beds***

As Chris explained above, the long-standing display at the Ryedale Folk Museum is due to change in 2013, with bigger nursery beds in a new location. The cornfield is likely to be in grass again this year. However we now also have arable plant display beds at North Yorkshire County Council's County Hall in Northallerton, Flamingo Land zoo and at the North

York Moors National Park offices in Helmsley, as well as in the private gardens of a number of keen individuals. Whilst helping to showcase some of these rare plants where people can actually get to see them, without taking an illicit stroll through their local arable fields, they also act as an 'insurance policy' for plant growth and seed production. The more beds we can create in different geographic areas of north-east Yorkshire, the more chance we have of minimising catastrophic losses in bad years, such as the one just gone. If you'd like more information on what's involved in the simple process of creating a cornfield bed yourself, just get in touch.

### ***Sharing our knowledge***

I'm pleased to announce that in December our first set of 'Species Cards' will be available to download from the North York Moors National Park website:

[www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/caring/our-work/cornfield-flower-project](http://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/caring/our-work/cornfield-flower-project)

These cards are designed to help you understand more about the unique plants we work with, their context in north-east Yorkshire and our experiences with them – the unique stories of how the Project first discovered these plants, learned to look after them and some of the successes we have had to date. Work continues to expand the range of plants covered, so keep checking throughout next year for new additions.

Also on this website you'll find a copy of the photographic exhibition content recently displayed at the Millennium Seedbank.

Chris Wilson & Tom Normandale

November 2012

---

Chris Wilson – Project Officer  
Cornfield Flowers Project  
01723 863467  
[chris.wilson@north-yorkshire-moors.org.uk](mailto:chris.wilson@north-yorkshire-moors.org.uk)

Tom Normandale – Project Officer  
Cornfield Flowers Project  
07543 540008  
[tom.normandale@north-yorkshire-moors.org.uk](mailto:tom.normandale@north-yorkshire-moors.org.uk)

[www.north-yorkshire-moors.org.uk/cornfield.pdf](http://www.north-yorkshire-moors.org.uk/cornfield.pdf)

[www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/caring/our-work/cornfield-flower-project](http://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/caring/our-work/cornfield-flower-project)

[www.sustainable-nymoors.org/2012/07/cornfield-flowers-project.html](http://www.sustainable-nymoors.org/2012/07/cornfield-flowers-project.html)

The Cornfield Flowers Project is spearheaded by the Carstairs Countryside Trust, Ryedale Folk Museum, North Yorkshire Moors Association and North York Moors National Park Authority. It is supported by the North York Moors National Park Sustainable Development Fund, North York Moors Coast & Hills LEADER Programme and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

