

Creating Habitat for Newts and Students Bath Spa University, Bath, UK

Bath Spa University

BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award category: Maintenance & Management

Project overview

The project was to create around 500sqm of wildflower meadow to provide suitable habitat for newts, this is in a walled garden that is also used by students for socialising, near the Student Union bar with areas for seating, outdoor games and BBQ's. It is important that the finished result provided not just habitat for newts but also pleasant and functional surroundings for the students to enjoy. The work was completed in April, a local contractor was brought in with his assistant the grounds team, 4, along with myself and our sustainability assistant all carried out the work over a period of about 4 days. The cost was around £3500.

What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

Poor, the areas were all short mown, one section did have wildflowers through it but this had been short mown in recent years.

Were there any specific conditions that led to you carrying out this work?

The university has just completed several large building projects, as part of these works a car park should have been removed and a wildflower meadow created in its place, all in relation to the newt licence. For various reasons this did not happen so in order to fulfil the requirements an alternative habitat of similar area had to be found nearby, as soon as possible



Laying the wildflower turf, two of us even came out of the office!

What were the biodiversity measures taken?

The whole project will have benefits beyond just creating newt habitat, attracting pollinating insects, which benefit our bats; it is also habitat for amphibians, invertebrates and mammals. It would not be successful however if the human elements were not fulfilled too, it has greatly enhanced the area where students sit about in the evenings, the mown pathways give access to the gravel paths and the wildflower sections were not walked on. The same approach was taken in other areas of the campus, flowering species existing in the sward were allowed to grow and flower with equal measures of success.

But I have to say not all of it has created a chocolate box meadow, the section that was seed sown has taught us some lessons. We rotavated the area and this exposed a seed bank of Teasels, a great seed source but too invasive in that area, they will be cut back to encourage the sown mixtures to come through.

Involving the team was important too, it was new to them so we went through the processes and looked at examples of what we needed to achieve. Short mown grass had always been a preference on site so it was a big change but it was important to keep the borders and surrounding edges tidy, close mowing does have its place.

I have already seen Goldfinches feeding on the seed heads, and it was as much a pleasure to hear the linnets twittering away this morning as it was to hear the cleaning team remarking on how much they loved the wildflowers as they walked through.



The wildflower turf section in early August.

How would you best describe the project?

Mitigation (and beyond!)

Further information

The three areas all received differing treatments :

Mowing ceased on the section that still had wildflowers in, many of the species were still in the sward and flowered well. Grass paths were mown through to give access to the seating and main pathway.

Another area was stripped of turf , this was stacked and covered to rot down for re use. This was sown with a chalk grassland perennial wildflower mix , along with a cornfield annual mix to give colour this season and act as a nurse crop for the perennial mix that will follow on.

Turf was also removed from the remaining and largest section, this was then laid with Wildflower Turf, which was irrigated initially and has established very well. This was particularly important as it was in a high profile area that was frequently for BBQ's and social events.

What was your personal motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

I knew we needed to provide the habitat for the newts but I wanted to do it in a way that would give us all some pleasure.



The areas where mowing ceased with access pathways cut through.