

Habitat Conservation at St Swithuns Churchyard



**Worthy's
Conservation
Volunteers**

Can you help?

The churchyard at St Swithuns is unquestionably one of the finest and most important examples of 'nature in churchyards' in our area. It offers us all an opportunity to study and better understand our relationship with our local wildlife. We must endeavour to protect and preserve this unique local natural environment, not just for the present but for the benefit of future generations too.

In case you didn't already know, St Swithuns church actually sits on an island. The streams that surround it are rich in chalk-stream fauna and flora. The graveyard beyond the church offers an equally fantastic 'grassy' habitat, and the many trees, bushes and wildflowers further increase this diverse ecosystem. Here are some of the species that can be found:

- Otter and water vole;
- Dragonflies – such as, southern hawker, blue emperor, common darter;
- Butterflies – such as, red admiral, speckled wood, comma;
- Moths – tiger, yellow underwing, brimstone;
- Stag Beetle;
- Birds – grey heron, little egret, great spotted woodpecker, tree creeper;
- Reptiles and amphibians – slow worm, frogs, toads; and
- Bats – common pipistrelle and Natterer's.



Water Vole

But these habitats are becoming increasingly fragile, being highly sensitive to invasion by dominant and/or non-native species, and also to decay. If neglected, the very 'life' of the churchyard will be threatened.

So what should we do about this? Well, actually we can do a great deal – not just to help protect the existing wildlife, but also to improve the habitats to bring in new species.

Several years ago, a major habitat improvement project was undertaken by Hampshire Wildlife Trust (HWT). This included the embedding of three otter holts, improvements to the river banks for water voles, narrowing the streams using faggots to ensure adequate water flow and prevention of silting, and some clearance of small trees and scrub to enable more light at ground level for wildflowers.

In more recent years, Worthys Conservation Volunteers has also undertaken some smaller-scale improvements, most notably to benefit wildflowers, both on and close to the river banks.

We now want to renew this conservation work, and with consultation with HWT start a programme of improvements and also educational studies. But we very much need some extra hands, not just to help with the more physical tasks but some of the lighter chores too. Initially, the plan is to carry out improvements over the next twelve months, and then to pull back on the heavy tasks and implement a regime of ongoing management for future years.



We would welcome your help, or maybe you would just like to be kept informed. Please email enquires@worthysconservationvolunteers.org.uk or phone/text Bruce on 07919 111221, or you can visit our website at www.worthysconservationvolunteers.org.uk.

As the proverb says 'many hands make light work'! So please come and join us and help this 'worthy' cause for local nature. The next working party at St Swithuns will be on Sunday 20 November, 1.30pm.

Bruce Graham, WCV Coordinator