

Tayside Green Kirk & Graveyard Initiative



Tayside Biodiversity Partnership

www.taysidebiodiversity.co.uk





UNIQUE HAVENS

These days there is a huge resurgence of interest in wildlife, but few of us actually know how to encourage ‘biodiversity’ into our surroundings. Areas around our churches, graveyards, cemeteries and crematoria are often undisturbed ‘islands’ in a predominately urban or agricultural neighbourhood. These islands have become very important habitats safeguarding our few remaining wildflower grasslands, mature trees, old hedges and lichen-covered walls. They have become living sanctuaries for our once-common birds, bats, butterflies and wildflowers. The way we care for these havens shows our respect not only for the resting place of the dead, but also for life and all living things.

GREEN KIRK & GRAVEYARD INITIATIVE

In Tayside this Initiative will encourage a simple review of our burial grounds and kirkyards to see how they can be enhanced for biodiversity. Even kirks with just a gravel perimeter can be part of the Initiative – wildlife can still be encouraged with hanging baskets, window boxes, or tubs of herbs or shrubs.

Several pilot projects have been set up in Angus, Dundee City, and Perth and Kinross. There is also an area set aside at Birkhill Cemetery as a Woodland Burial site. Anyone interested in ‘greening’ their kirkyard is encouraged to register their interest. We are working with Eco-Congregation Scotland, an ecumenical programme, which links our local projects to a wider remit. Urban or rural, everyone is welcome to join the Initiative.

SPREADING THE WORD

It’s important to involve as many local people as possible so that proposed changes can be fully discussed. Include a ‘Green Kirk and Graveyard’ column in the church newsletter or promote local interest by preparing your own leaflet or guide. Encourage everyone to collect sightings of wildlife. Ask for a copy of the Initiative’s poster to display in the church porch, village hall or local post office.

WHAT IS BIODIVERSITY?

It simply means “the variety of all living things”: it includes the finest insects and the largest trees - and us.

FIRST - FIND OUT WHAT'S THERE

Before any changes are made, it is essential to find out what is already there. A simple plan of the graveyard or area around the kirk should show the main features: paths in regular use, flower borders, memorial areas, grass, trees, hedges, walls, little-used areas, etc.



SURVEY

List the different “habitats”: mown grass, longer grass, trees, shrubs, hedges, walls, flower borders, compost heaps, dead wood. Include the old gravestones and tombs as they are especially important for lichens, mosses and ferns. And don't forget to include the church itself and any other buildings – they may host bats or swifts.

Next, carry out a wildlife survey, i.e. mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians, insects, plants, fungi. Put in everything you think important, including geological features or information about the gravestones or architecture - the survey does not have to stop at just the wildlife.

NEXT - PLAN THE FUTURE

Involve the local community. Spend time collecting the survey information and making sense of it.

A *Kirk and Graveyard Biodiversity Action Plan* might be appropriate. This will include a ‘management’ section. Advice is available from many sources: your local Ranger Service, Scottish Wildlife Trust, the Local Authority Tree or Woodland Officers, Tayside Biodiversity Partnership - and of course specialist organisations such as Butterfly Conservation Scotland, Bat Conservation Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, British Lichen Society, or Concern for Swifts (Scotland). Scottish Natural Heritage’s “Garden for

Life” leaflets give advice on which plants attract wildlife.

There may be sufficient voluntary help available within the local community or nearby school, but if not there are several organisations that may be able to help with the work itself: the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV Scotland), various local Conservation Volunteer groups, or the Community Service Volunteers (CSV).

Consider drawing up a ‘Maintenance Calendar’ so that everyone can see which months are going to be the busiest - this will help organise a work programme.

There will be opportunities to report back all the work you carry out. Many of the species and habitats present in

graveyards are listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan drawn up after the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. UK “Priority Species” such as Pipistrelle Bat, Song Thrush and Tree Sparrow and “Species of Conservation Concern” such as Hedgehog, Brown Long-Eared Bat, Common Shrew, Greenfinch and Wild Hyacinth - not to mention many lesser-known fungi and lichens - all have targets within the UKBAP and Tayside Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The Tayside Biodiversity Partnership reports regularly on local projects which help meet UKBAP targets, so it really is a case of “every action counts”.



ACTION!

Restoration or enhancement projects belong to anyone who wishes to get involved. There will still be a need to

regularly survey and monitor the wildlife, but there will also be opportunities for practical work such as making bird, bat or insect boxes, raking off cut grass, making compost, hedge planting or

trimming, planting nectar-rich herbs, flowers or shrubs, or making log piles. Most importantly - celebrate everyone's contribution, acknowledge their input and inject some fun into all the effort!

**TO REGISTER YOUR CHURCH,
PLEASE SEND BRIEF**

DETAILS TO:

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You will receive a registration poster
and survey forms

FURTHER INFORMATION

SNH Garden for Life Leaflets:
www.snh.org.uk Tel: 01738 444177

Scottish Wildlife Trust:

www.swt.org.uk

RSBP:

www.rspb.org.uk;

Concern for Swifts Scotland:

www.concernforswifts.com

Bat Conservation Trust:

www.bats.org.uk

Butterfly Conservation Scotland:

www.butterflyconservation.org

BTCV:

www.btcv.org.uk

Eco-Congregation:

www.eco-congregation.org/scotland

Mammals Trust UK:

www.mtuk.org

Froglife:

www.froglife.org

Buglife:

www.buglife.org.uk

Bumblebee Conservation Trust:

www.bumblebeeconservationtrust.co.uk

British Lichen Society:

www.thebls.org.uk

CREDITS

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GREENING THE GRAVEYARD

Don't be tempted to tackle long grass in one season – you could inadvertently destroy habitat for slow worms, amphibians, small mammals or bumble bees. Always leave cut grass for a few days to allow wildlife to disperse or wildflowers to set seed.

Aim for a variety of grass lengths – short mown grass in visible areas, medium grass in less frequented areas. If appropriate, create a Butterfly Meadow or "Contemplation Zone" in a secluded area, with seating to encourage visitors to sit quietly to watch the wildlife. Long grass needs to be cut, but get advice as to the best time to maximise its use by butterflies and for any wildflowers or grasses to set seed. Use native origin wildflower plant plugs or seek advice on how to create a wildflower meadow from seed.

Plant berry-bearing trees such as holly, yew, crab apple and rowan. Willow, hazel and alder are also worth considering. Only plant oak, ash or lime if there is sufficient room for them to grow to maturity.

When planting or renewing a hedge, use native hedgerow species such as hawthorn, hazel, holly, wild rose and blackthorn as they provide winter food for birds and small mammals.

In a woodland setting check the current ground flora and, if appropriate, consider planting snowdrops, winter aconite, wood anemone, primroses, native ferns or wild hyacinth (sourced from reputable suppliers who guarantee that their stock is not taken from the wild).

Separate woody trimmings and small branches from the compost and make a "log pile" in a quiet corner – this may be used by hibernating hedgehogs and toads, slow worms or insects. Wrens and other small birds will sometimes use a large log pile to nest in and many birds will explore it for insects.

Retain anthills – some plants and butterflies depend on ants for some aspect of survival.

Leave small holes under eaves, tiles or roof spaces as you could trap bats either hibernating there or in maternity roosts. You could also inadvertently exclude nesting swifts that often use small holes at the top of buildings.

Use untreated rough sawn wood for making bat, bird and insect boxes.

Keep chemical use at an absolute minimum and seek professional advice before treating timbers or roofs as you could destroy bat colonies.

Celebrate (and publicise) your achievements regularly!

TIPS FOR MAINTENANCE & ENHANCEMENT

Trees - check for Tree Preservation Orders on existing trees and obtain professional advice before deciding the fate of misshapen or storm-damaged trees. Where safe, retain standing deadwood as it is a vital component of biodiversity - but if a tree has to be felled, consider leaving it nearby as 'lying dead wood'.

Hedges - aim for thick A-shaped hedges and trim once every two years (in January or February only) to retain berries for winter bird food. Don't spray the base of the hedge as it is often used by hedgehogs, other small mammals and bumblebees.

Walls - leave mosses and lichens on walls and gravestones, or obtain professional advice if you wish to remove them. Some lichens take 50 years to grow just a couple of centimetres and some specialise in being at the top of stones, whilst others need to be under ledges.

Gravel paths - these are often good for wildlife as many beetles and other insects need sandy soil and stony areas. They will also use sandy or peaty slopes with or without leaf litter, natural stone outcrops, surrounding walls and gravestones.

Ivy - Removal can cause more damage than by leaving it alone. Ivy does not kill trees and is a superb wildlife plant offering nesting and roosting sites for birds and bats, winter feed for birds and early nectar for insects. It only needs to be removed from crumbling walls, young saplings, or where it is smothering its host tree.

Scattered plants - enjoy plantings of honeysuckle, lilac, rambling roses, lavender, rosemary, sweet rocket, wallflower, thyme, marjoram - they are all attractive to wildlife.

COLOURFUL PLANTS - phlox, forget-me-not, ice plant, honesty, globe thistle, red valerian, poached egg plant, chives, borage, aubrietia, michaelmas daisy, marigolds, cornflowers, foxgloves - they all attract beneficial insects such as hoverflies, bumble bees and butterflies.

Machinery - use brush cutters and trimmers carefully as they can kill young trees or cause damage to gravestones.

