Nature in Your Neighbourhood
A Guide to Improving Wildlife on Your Doorstep

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Produced by the Surrey Urban Biodiversity Project.

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This leaflet is aimed at Parish Councils and community groups that look after, or are responsible for areas of green spaces that are important for wildlife, or have the potential to be important for wildlife.

The landscape in Surrey has evolved from the interaction between people and wildlife and most areas need to be managed to maintain or encourage the wildlife interest.

The following sections contain an overview of the steps that can be taken to manage different types of habitat. More detailed information is available from the organisations listed at the end of this leaflet, or the www.surreycc.gov.uk/urbanbiodiversity website.

If your site is designated a SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), or is adjacent to one, then the advice of English Nature / Natural England should be sought. (English Nature is becoming Natural England by the end of 2006).

There are other designations that can apply to sites such as Site of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCI) or Local Nature Reserve (LNR). Relevant advice should be sought for these sites.

Leave areas of lawn / grassland uncut in the spring and summer to reveal which grasses and flowers are present. Best results for this are if the grassland already contains mostly fine-leaved grasses and a variety of meadow herbs.

If you want to encourage more flowers:

• Cut grass very short in autumn.  
• Rake vigorously / rotovate depending on size of grassland area to create patches of bare ground.  
• Seed can be scattered on the bare ground.  
• Plugs / pot grown plants may be more successful in established grasslands.  
• Yellow rattle is good if vigorous grasses are present as it parasitises some grasses, allowing flowering plants a chance to grow.  
• Wildflower plants used, either in seed, plug or potted form should be native, and where
Scrub is important as it provides nesting places, shelter and food for birds, invertebrates and mammals. The scrub edge is particularly important for a wide range of plant and animal species, especially insects.

Scrub will eventually turn into woodland. It should be managed appropriately if you want to keep it as scrub.

- Management should aim to extend the scrub edge by cutting scallops – this increases the area of scrub edge, and also avoids unnatural straight lines being visible on the site.
- The timing of the grass cut should vary from year to year to allow late-flowering plants to set seed.
- If the meadow is grazed, then try varying the time of year that the animals are on the site, to allow different plants to flower and set seed.
- Thick scrub should be thinned and allowed to regenerate on a rotational basis.

Scrub can become a problem when a site is under managed and it invades open habitats such as meadows or heathland.

Volunteers clearing scrub from this grassland site, as part of a scrub management project.

To manage the meadow after sowing / planting:

First Year:

- The meadow should be cut when vegetation reaches 10-15cm. This usually means cutting 3-4 times between spring and autumn depending on fertility. Do not cut shorter than 5cm. Remove cuttings.

Subsequent years and established meadows:

- Cut and remove once between late June and the end of August.
- As an additional benefit for insects, part of the meadow should be left uncut over the winter to ensure some seed heads and shelter are available for insects. This area should be cut the following spring.
- The original open habitat is more valuable for wildlife in terms of plants and invertebrates found, then steps should be taken to reduce the amount of scrub.

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- A plan should be drawn up about what scrub should be kept, and what should be cleared.
- An ideal habitat for invertebrates, birds and mammals is a mosaic of scrub and open areas.
- Small scrub may be able to be cleared by hand by volunteers.