

Summer 2014

Marston Grange News

Issue 1

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GARDEN FOCUS

The star feature of the garden at Marston Grange in Summer is undoubtedly the meadow and, the beauty of it is, that it changes every year and brings its own surprises to intrigue and delight each time

The meadow at Marston Grange was sown in September 2009 as part of our Environmental agreement and as an enhancement to the garden. The mix consists of 21 species of pollen and nectar rich flower and 6 native grasses to attract insects and pollinators, which, in turn, attract the birds and wildlife.

Each year a different flower species tends to dominate. Last year it was the ox-eye daisy, this year it was the later Yarrow and wild carrot. The Greater Knapweed is always a favourite with its purple thistle-like flower. The parasitic Yellow Rattle is gently encroaching from the dampest and shadiest parts on the South side of the meadow to begin to control the grass sward and it is interesting to see how the flowers flourish at the expense of the grasses now in these areas.

As always, we cut a path through the meadow. Not only does this allow us to see more clearly the variety of flowers in the sward but it also allows the partridge and hares to use the meadow, and the barn owls in particular have benefited this year.

The barn owls nested and successfully raised at least one chick in the owl box at the end of the meadow and the male owl regularly used the paths and margins cut as his hunting territory.

The new cutting garden which has now taken over my vegetable plot in the orchard has been a floral delight despite my learning the hard way that you really will need to stake these plants – just in case we get the tail end of a passing hurricane in August – how likely is that?



Despite its floppiness there have been some real delights with the Alstromerias, Dahlias, Cobeas and incessant Cosmos and Sweet Peas being amongst my favourites. I couldn't bring myself to cut them, except for very special occasions, but enjoyed them in the garden just as much.

It looks like Autumn will come early, as a result of an early spring and dry season. Bonuses for the year have been the abundance of blossom in the orchard, followed by plentiful fruit, strong second flowerings of geraniums, delphiniums and roses and long flowering periods in the shrub borders. Overall, not a bad summer for the garden, just hard work keeping on top of the lush growth and harvesting!!

**FINDING
SPACE
FOR
CREATIVITY**

Celebrating our first year in NGS

This was the 'strapline' which I chose for Worm Holes bookshop which I owned until 2004 and, somehow, it still seems to be with me in connection with our new Events Barn. My hope was always that the Barn would be an opportunity for people to explore their own creative development and inherent talents, be they horticultural, ecological, literary or cultural. Wild About Gardening is just the start of this and we are looking to build on this further in 2015.

We are exploring ideas for hawk walks and birding breakfasts, poetry events and children's educational events.

Please keep an eye on our Events Diary for more information as we develop the Barn further and look for opportunities to work with like-minded individuals and organisations



“Is the café open every day?”

The first thing I must say about our NGS day was that it was an incredible experience of the power of team work.

Last September I felt that I had set out on the journey to hold an NGS Day feeling very much alone. From planting daffodils in an icy gale to hacking at nettles in sweltering spring heat and watering newly planted borders and trees for hours on end. However, there was always someone to prop me up along the way and to whom I must now say my thanks.

Special thanks goes firstly to my husband, David, for putting up with me. Then to my parents and David's mum for guiding and supporting us both. However, on the day the team just seemed to escalate and our thanks to you all – the Marie Curie team who provided scrummy cakes in the barn, Sally and Sally who provided the plants and flowers for the plant stall and table displays.

To Anne and Barry Wright who have helped me so much in my

understanding of wildlife and habitats since I came to the farm, and who provided expert insight in to the meadow, to Dave Cooke who brought his battlefield history knowledge to our walk, to Gert Van Hoff for loaning his beautiful sculptures to accent the garden and to Bidy and Marshall, our local NGS organizer for her support on the day. And, last, but by no means least, Geoff Chambers, my long-suffering garden helper, who makes our grass look like no-one else can.

Finally, our thanks to everyone who visited us. We had 216 people on the day and 3 further evening groups in the following weeks. Overall we raised £1449 for NGS and for Marie Curie and we were delighted. We could not have done this by ourselves and we were just amazed at the support and generosity of people. Sowe are looking forward to doing it all again on Sunday 7th June 2015 and we hope you will join us!!

Recent Visitors & News

Throughout the summer I was almost able to guarantee that if I quietly sauntered through the garden to the orchard at dusk I would be able to see the owl sat on the fence under the old holly trees scanning up and down the margins, so deep in concentration that he would not notice me tiptoeing nearer each time he turned away. It beats watching Emmerdale any day!!



The new wildlife pond was completed in the spring; in time for our June NGS opening. This has created so many different opportunities for visiting wildlife it has exceeded even my expectations. The resident colony of tree sparrows were immediately appreciative and claimed the new feeding table next to the pond for their own. However, this meant that within 2 weeks we had the female sparrow hawk taking a leisurely bath – and possibly dinner, though I was not witness to this – thankfully. I had eagerly stocked the pond with native fish which were growing well but in August I was baffled when they stopped coming to feed. Not for long though when I spotted the heron one morning stood on the edge of the pond. I should have netted it but couldn't bring myself to spoil the look of it.



Saying 'Goodbye' to the old combine

Sadly June saw a fond farewell to our old Class Dominator 88. She first came to the farm when my husband, David, was 25 years old and served him faithfully for 28 years but we had to take a decision as to how much longer we needed her to keep going for and it was clear that she wasn't going to make that many more years so a tear was shed and we took the decision to invest in a 5 year old Claas Tucano to replace her.



After taking down the phone line when she arrived and then a few teething problems at the start of harvest the new arrival has made a good start and we look forward to many years of service with her.