

## Wildlife in Churchyards



16,000 buildings. One resource



Churchyards are important not only as places of burial and quiet reflection but for their characteristic habitats and as refuges for wildlife and plantlife. The following notes are intended as a starting point for considering care of your churchyard.

### Surveys and management plans

It is a good idea for the PCC to think carefully about how they are going to deal with any issues arising over the care of the churchyard. This is best dealt with by being prepared and having a survey and management plan in place and not in response to an urgent situation.

- Arrange for a competent survey to be made of the wildlife in the church and churchyard. – contact your local wildlife trust in the first instance for help, and consider commissioning a professional survey if there is a particular threat to the natural heritage.
- Draw up a management plan for the churchyard based on the survey and then try to follow it. The plan should provide a framework for maintenance and management which observes the primary function of the churchyard and respects and encourages diversity of wildlife. It is usually helpful to have an annotated map.
- Explain the management plan as widely as possible – use notices in the porch and if appropriate in the parish magazine and guidebook. Engage local schools who can use the

churchyard as a base for lessons covering a variety of the curriculum including maths, art, history, science and geography.

- Review what is happening in the churchyard and the management plan every few years, perhaps in line with the quinquennial inspection as a useful reminder.

### Grassland in the churchyard

Areas of grassland in churchyards are important for many reasons and can contribute significantly to the setting and character. Think carefully before making



changes which may impact on the grassed areas.

- Keep up the traditional way of looking after your particular churchyard unless there are good reasons for change.
- Collect the grass cuttings after each mow if you can – leaving them in place can smother plants and lead to a decline in species diversity.
- Increase the diversity of the types of grass by mowing different areas at different intervals. Different types of grassland management regimes can be found in Wildlife & Church & Churchyard.



### Stonework habitats

Keep an eye on walls as well and include these in your management plan.

- Church walls and churchyard walls can provide interesting places for plants to grow. Mosses and lichen are always acceptable, while ferns and soft-rooted herbs should be allowed on the less important walls. Woody plants should be removed.

### Trees

Trees can contribute significantly to the character and setting of your churchyard. Although usually self sufficient, occasionally trees need care and attention.

- If a tree in your churchyard has a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) this means that you will need permission from the local authority (as well as a

faculty) before you fell it or undertake tree surgery, the same applies if the church is within a conservation area.

- If you need to carry out works to a tree immediately because of imminent health and safety concerns (eg after a storm) you may need to apply for retrospective permissions. Take photographic evidence to show why you needed to take action.
- Trees are often selected and planted to lend meaning to the setting of the church and careful consideration is needed with replacement or removal.
- Think carefully about allowing car parking, or introducing hard surfaces around trees and under tree canopies, particularly surface rooting trees. Damage may not be obvious immediately but decline will appear in a decade or so and may unintentionally damage the setting of the churchyard.
- Don't forget the need for a bat-survey if you are felling trees or limbs from trees.



- Planting new trees is not always environmentally friendly – consider
- Trees should be inspected annually for any safety concerns.
- Consult the DAC before planting or removing a tree, it's likely that a faculty will be needed for either.

### **Help from the Diocese**

You can expect that your Diocese, or more specifically the DAC will have done / will do the following things:

- Give proper weight to the conservation of the natural heritage alongside other considerations when giving advice to churches.
- Appoint an ecologist to the committee.
- Mark certificates for faculty petitions where they consider work may affect bats.

Use your DAC as the first port of call for enquiries or concerns about your churchyard.

### **Further reading:**

Caring for God's Acre

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