

PARISH ECOLOGICAL MONITORING

In 1985, a field-by-field ecological survey of the Parish was made by the County Council's Ecology Unit. Similar surveys were made of all parishes in Leicestershire to identify sites of ecological importance. The data was fed into the County Structure Plan, but only a few of the most important sites have become nature reserves or protected from development.

The original surveys are now kept by the Ecology Unit at Birstall and are gradually being updated and computerised. The Unit is also the clearing house and depository for all kinds of biological recording and survey work. Most of these records may be consulted by any member of the public (by appointment), and are an excellent starting point for finding out about the wildlife of an area. I have copies of the surveys for Carlton, if anyone would like to see them.

Over the Christmas holiday I updated the survey of Carlton. The most striking finding was the continuing loss of unimproved grassland - essentially old hay meadows rich in wild flowers. The 1985 survey identified 23.5 acres of this grassland in Carlton, but at the end of 1996 the total had shrunk to 7.8 acres of which 2 acres was under threat: a loss of 67%. Eight of these meadows had been surveyed and contained an average of 21 different vascular plants (range 14-34 species).

The best meadow in Carlton is considered significant at District level, and is the 3.8 acre field between Carlton Brook and Congerstone Road which is a picture in early summer. Although it is of botanical interest, this field is part of Lineage Farm and private, being managed for hay and grazing. Please admire it from the gate and roadside and do not trespass. The following species have been recorded from this field:

<i>Ajuga reptans</i> (Bugle)	<i>Alchemilla vulgaris</i> (Lady's mantle)
<i>Anthriscus sylvestris</i> (Cow parsley)	<i>Bellis perennis</i> (Daisy)
<i>Caltha palustris</i> (Marsh Marigold)	<i>Cardamine pratensis</i> (Cuckoo flower)
<i>Carex</i> sp. (Sedge)	<i>Centaurea nigra</i> (Black knapweed)
<i>Chamerion angustifolium</i> (Rose bay willow herb - now <i>Epilobium</i>)	
<i>Chrysosplenium oppositifolium</i> (Opposite-leaved golden saxifrage)	
<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i> (Meadowsweet)	<i>Juncus effusus</i> (Soft rush)
<i>Juncus inflexus</i> (Hard rush)	
<i>Lychnis flos-cuculi</i> (Ragged robin)	<i>Lysimachia nummularia</i> (Creeping jenny)
<i>Mentha aquatica</i> (Water mint)	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i> (Ribwort plantain)
<i>Plantago major</i> (Greater plantain)	<i>Ranunculus acris</i> (Meadow buttercup)
<i>Ranunculus repens</i> (Creeping buttercup)	<i>Rumex</i> sp. (Dock)
<i>Sanguisorba officinalis</i> (Great burnet)	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i> (Dandelion)
<i>Trifolium pratense</i> (Red clover)	<i>Veronica beccabunga</i> (Brooklime)
<i>Veronica</i> sp. (Speedwell)	

The survey was not all gloom and doom. At 4.3 acres the area of rough grassland is the same as in 1985. Only two short lengths of old hedgerow have been lost since 1985, though roughly equivalent lengths of new hedgerow have been planted. Some neglected hedgerows have been cut and laid or better managed. The Parish has also gained five small new mixed deciduous woods and a small nature refuge. Three large ponds have also been dug, though two of them are used for commercial angling.

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