



Woodland Flora Improvement Project 2020



Woodland wildflower seed mix ready for sowing at Southwood Woodland

Summary

This year marked the fourth and penultimate year of the Blackwater Valley Countryside Woodland Flora project. Covid-19 brought challenges and reduced the number of volunteers that were able to take part however, BVC Partnership (BVCP) Rangers and Volunteers were still able to sow the equivalent of nearly two football pitches of woodland. To reduce competition and ensure the longevity of native biodiversity, invasive non-native species were removed. For the first time in the project we also installed signs, within woodlands with a now established flora to alert people to our work and the rationale behind it. The project was once again financially supported by the Blackwater Valley Countryside Trust (BVCT).

Reason for the project

The Blackwater Valley has many young woodlands that have an impoverished ground flora when compared to ancient woodlands. The ground flora is an essential part of a native woodland habitat, supporting in turn many other species and contributing significantly to the aesthetic value of the woodland.

The young woodlands have largely been created by planting trees and shrubs. Ground flora is rarely, if ever, included in the planting plan. Many woodland flowers have evolved to survive in a stable habitat rather than disperse, making them poor at colonising new sites. The lack of connectivity between the young woodlands and the more established woods in the Valley further restricts the flora from colonising naturally. The more wildflower-rich local woodlands there are, the more likely those seeds can spread to other areas.

Planting recognisable native flowers close to footpaths will improve their appearance and make visitors feel proud of their local sites. These flowers - such as carpets of Bluebells - may become reasons on their own for people to visit and care about the woodlands. Involving local volunteers and community groups is an important element of the project. The five-year period of the project gives time, not only to get more people involved, but so that they can see results of their efforts.



Ground at Heather Hill prepped for sowing



Wood Anemone now established at Hawley Meadows

Project Team

The project has been led by Jenny Sibley on behalf of the BVCP and by Alan Taylor on behalf of the BVCT. This year seed sowing was carried out by the BVCP Rangers, the Blackwater Valley Countryside Volunteers, the Southwood Woodland Improvement Group, and the Snaky Lane Local Nature Reserve Group. We are grateful to those volunteers who were still able to offer their help despite the added pressures of Covid-19 this year.

Implementation

Over 10kg of woodland wildflower seeds were procured from British Flora, a trusted supplier of native provenance seeds. A total of twelve different species were contained within the mix including Garlic Mustard, Lady's Bedstraw, Foxglove, Meadowsweet, Hedge Bedstraw, Water Aven, Wood Aven, Primrose, Selfheal, Red Campion, Wood Sage, and Upright Hedge Parsley. Procurement of bulbs and specific species of wildflowers was one of the challenges brought about by the lockdown this year, however this range of species will increase diversity and the chances of successful establishment.

Seven sites were identified as good receptors for these species of wildflowers including Southwood Woodland, Frimley Hatches, Snaky Lane Nature Reserve, Heather Hill, Chalk Farm, Princes and Queen's (the last four being part of Wellesley Woodlands). Areas sown are shown on the maps in the appendix.



Red Campion now established at Gerry's Copse



New sign at Thorn Hill

Ground preparation and continued maintenance of the site is required prior to sowing seeds and to reduce the competition from both native and non-native invasive plants. The non-native invasive species that were removed include Variegated Archangel, Montbretia, Rhododendron, Cherry Laurel, Himalayan and Orange Balsam. Volunteers continue to be a big help by removing invasive non-native species, cutting back the nettle and bramble understorey and thinning trees. Once the competition was removed, the ground was made ready by raking back fallen leaves to ensure the seeds contacted the soil. The seeds were then scattered on the raked patch, trodden in and the leaf litter replaced.

Survey work on previously sown areas identified five sites where the native flowers we had sown had become established. Signs were erected for visitors to see, to explain the work we have done, and help raise the profile of the Trust and Partnership.

Thank you to all the Rangers, Volunteers and Trustees who helped with the project.

Project Finances

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Expenditure	£	£	£	£
Seed/bulb/signs purchased	2,269	1,982	1,624	1,988
In kind value				
Cost to BVCP of staff time	1,026	1,944	1,737	2,517
Value of volunteers	1,800	3,720	7,790	1,800
Total Project Value	5,095	7,646	11,239	6,305
Contribution from BVC Trust	2,269	2,600	3,300	4,000

Future work

We hope to obtain funding to continue the project for a fifth year. This final year will involve continuing our efforts to remove invasive plants, monitor the sown plots to see how well they have established, planting bulbs to top up sown plots and erecting more signage to explain the work we have done, and help raise the profile of the Trust and Partnership.

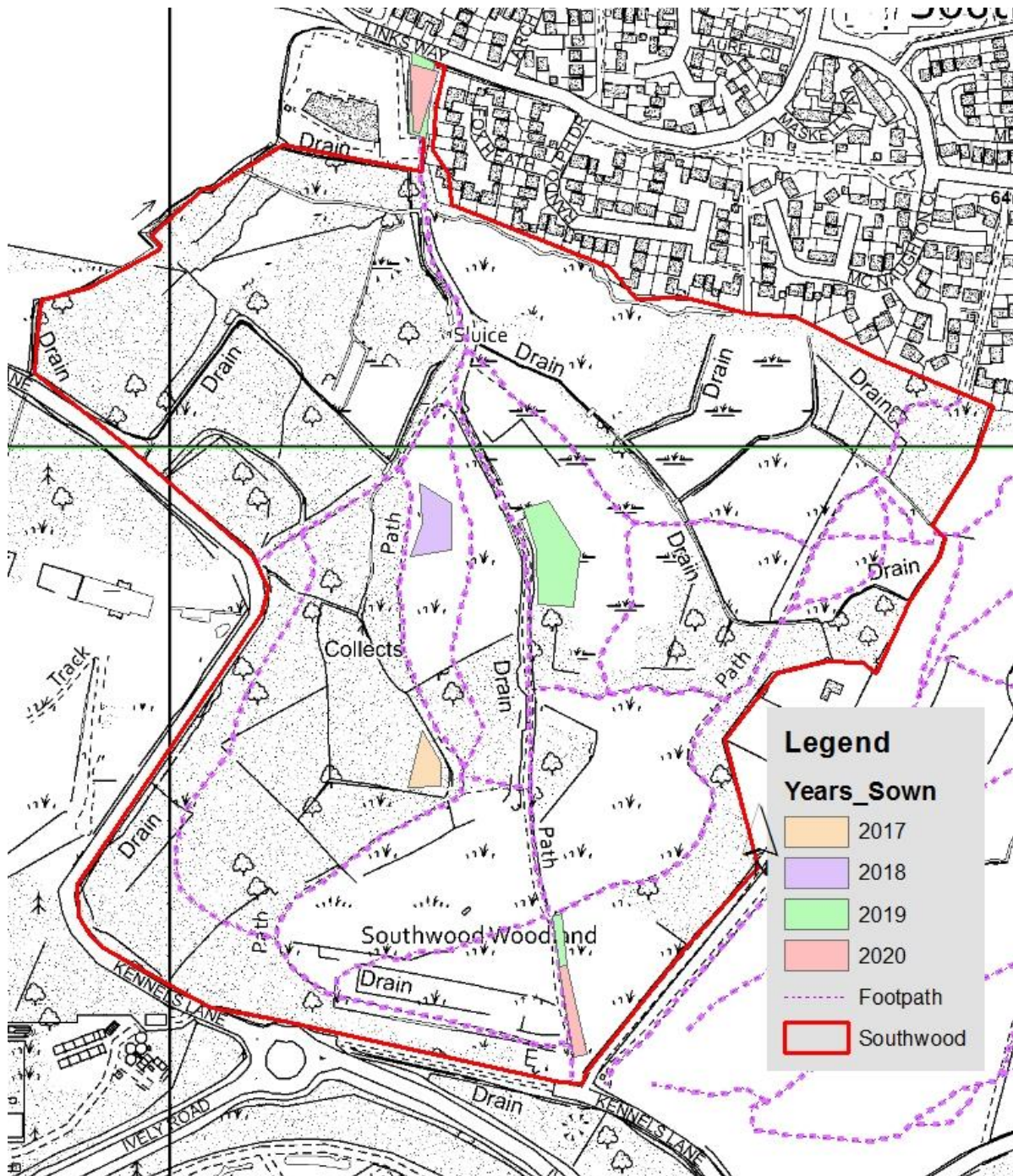
Report compiled by

Jenny Sibley, Ranger BVCP,

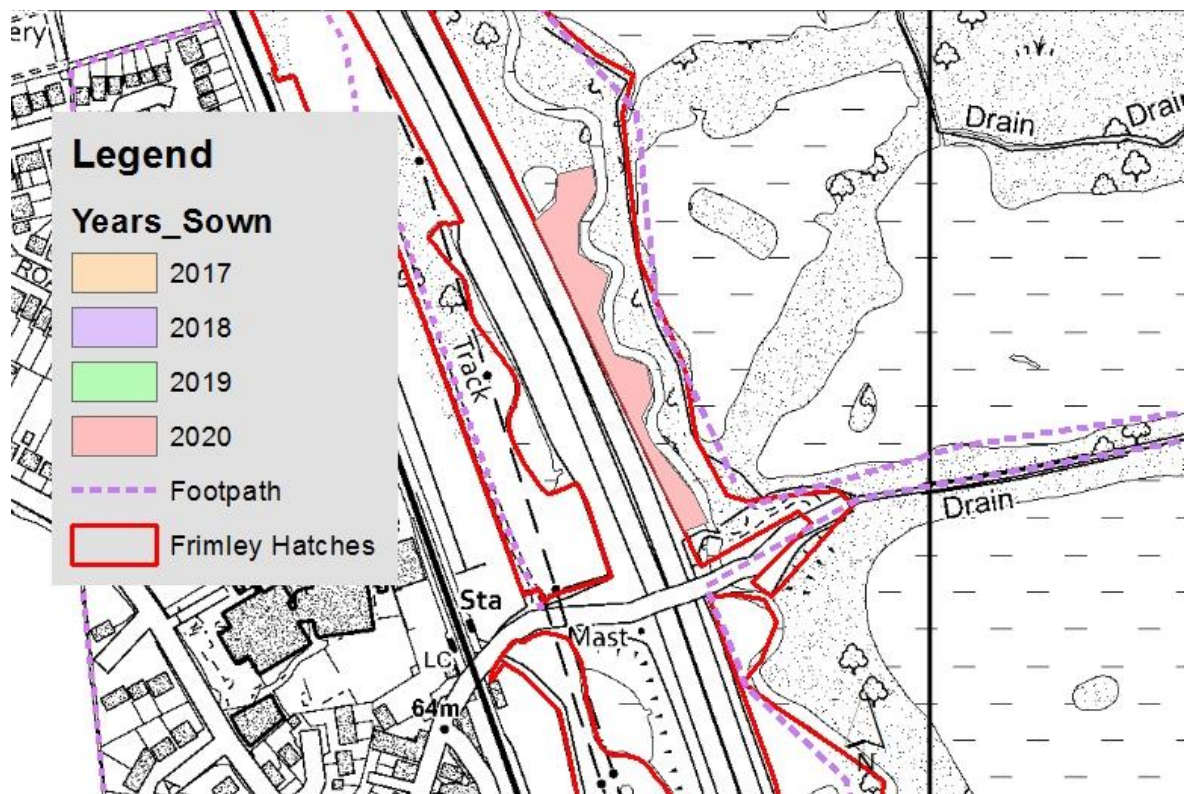
jenny.sibley@hants.gov.uk, 01252 331353

Appendix I

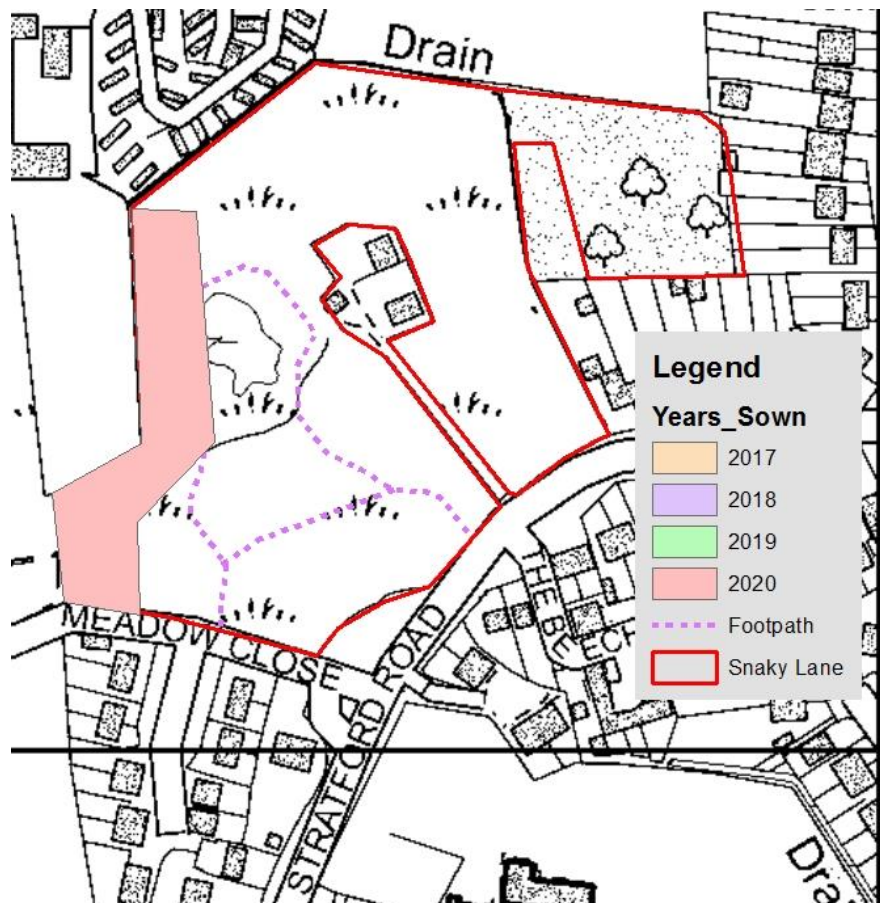
Location of woodland ground flora introduction at Southwood Woodland.



Location of woodland ground flora introduction at Frimley Hatches.



Location of woodland ground flora introduction at Snaky Lane Nature Reserve.



Woodland Flora Project Report 2020

Location of woodland ground flora introduction on Wellesley Woodland sites.

