

A couple of days ago I went for a walk on the back of Hartland point, in a new area I had not walked in before. As usual I had binoculars, looking for birds. By chance I found a little used vehicle track leading into a large conifer plantation (OS grid ref SS299202). The track was gravelled, with rough grass up the middle and about a 1 meter strip of rough grass on either side, before the track fell away into the woodland. The grass strips on both sides were covered in a wonderful mixture of native wild flowers, all there completely naturally.

Walking along this track I hardly saw a bird, but the whole path was awash with butterflies. I noticed peacocks, red admirals, silver wash fritillaries, commas, gatekeepers, ringlets, blues, meadow browns, whites, speckled woods and probably others I cannot remember or could not name. If I ever had any doubt about the correlation between butterflies and wild flowers, it was completely dispelled on that lovely walk.

Wild flowers were a strong theme running through many of the presentations at the wildlife conference I attended at the beginning of July (see my report). Wildflowers in meadows, in roadside verges, in churchyards and in people's gardens. Amongst many of the delegates I sensed a real enthusiasm for local action to increase wildflower spaces and I have had that same sense of enthusiasm talking to friends and neighbours in Ashford. Some of you have already started by introducing patches of long grass and wildflowers in your own gardens. I have been experimenting myself for a couple of years with different grass cutting regimes. By leaving some areas uncut, with only the grasses and flowers that were already resident in my 'lawn' (sometimes called weeds!), I have enjoyed the beginnings of a micro meadow. Of course, many butterflies will be very content with the lovely range of herbaceous plants already found in your flower beds. However, a tightly mown lawn, attractive as it may be to humans, is a bit of a desert to a bug or a butterfly and a small patch of uncut grass will add both variety and an additional source of nectar.

If you are interested in the above and need any help with ideas, sources of information or just want to chat over possibilities, please just ask. Now is a good time to be thinking about what you might do in your garden next summer!

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