



Sturminster Newton High School Sixth Form

Sturminster Newton High School *Rewilding Project*

Year 1 - Phase 1

The recent, devastating loss of natural habitats and species is a reality that many people have witnessed during their lifetimes. The drivers of climate change have not been addressed and it has become an emergency that impacts the lives of millions of people every day and that has contributed to the degradation of the natural world. The UK lost 56% of species between 1970 and 2013; 15% of those remaining are on critically endangered. Many in the scientific community understand that we are on the brink of ecological collapse.

But there is hope and a willingness to take direct positive action to improve conditions for nature –and for ourselves. Working with **Operation Future Hope**, Sturminster Newton High School is embarking on an ambitious *rewilding* project. Nestled in rural North Dorset the school enjoys fine views of local Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and sites of conservation interest. The school site however is currently typical in its poor quality as a natural habitat and refuge for local wildlife. All this is about to change!

“WE MUST REWILD THE WORLD” *Sir David Attenborough*

By rewilding areas of the school grounds our school will help to restore nature whilst reconnecting young people with the land, informing them about conservation issues and equipping them with practical knowledge and skills to enable them to engage in caring for the natural world. We believe that by inspiring young people to value nature their familiar and the local community will take up the challenge of living their lives in a way that support the whole community of life on Earth.

As we begin the process of making more space for nature there are some easy wins. The first steps in Year 1 are outlined and explained below.



Start-up actions:

1. Stop use of chemicals

Stop the use of all herbicide treatment at the base of all hedges around entire the school grounds in order to re-establish grasses and wildflowers at field margins and hedge boundaries. No herbicide or pesticide treatments should be used on any other areas of the school grounds other than as and when necessary on the concrete driveway and paths at the front of the main school building. However, herbicides should not be used on any path edging that is adjacent to grass banks or lawns. The image to the right (**Fig. 1**) illustrates the consequences of herbicide use, killing plant life and leaving unattractive bare ground devoid of wildlife potential.

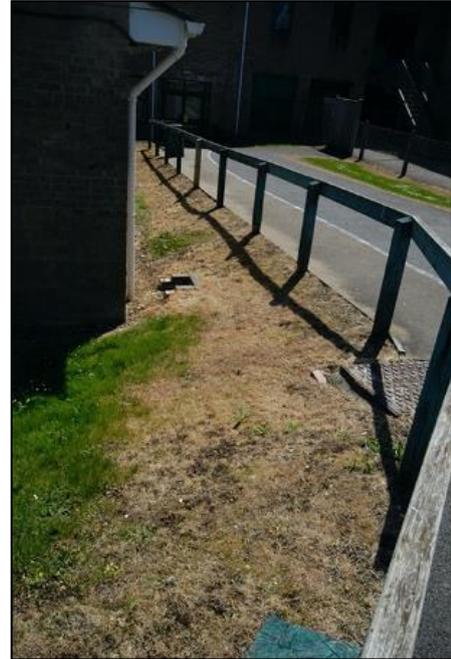


Fig. 1 herbicide treatment on edge of paths

2. Hedgerow Management

Further cutting of hedges and shrubs around the school grounds should be suspended. The only exception may be at entrance points to the car park and buildings where shrub growth may present a hazard if not regularly cut. Apart from a vertical 'A' frame cut on the roadside only, hedges should not be cut for the next 2 - 3 years. This will allow them to regenerate and recover. A cutting management regime will then be established for 1/3 of the hedgerows to be cut in rotation each year in order to maintain winter cover, shelter and food sources for wildlife within the remaining uncut 2/3 of hedges around the school grounds (*Note: it is now the bird breeding season and hedges, trees, and shrubs should be left undisturbed until November*).



Fig. 2 Herbicide treatment at the base of hedgerows and trees - see dead brown areas with no vegetation

3. Grass Margins

The school should begin the immediate establishment of grass margins to a minimum depth of 2m from the base of all hedgerows around the playing fields, and more where possible (for example, at the top of the playing field). Simply stop all mowing around the edges of the entire playing fields to allow grass margins to develop. A crisp edge can be maintained by regular mowing along the boundary between the edge of the grass margins and the start of the playing fields - see photo examples below.



Fig. 4 Example of Grass Margins



Fig. 3 Year 2 regeneration

This is what we are working towards – restored hedgerows and wide grass margins. Note the depth of the margins in this photo. The grounds at this school were identical to yours and in two years of new management this is the result!

These broad grass margins at the edge of the sports fields at Sherborne Girls School are an excellent habitat for wildlife –and very attractive. The long grass margin was simply left to grow and a clean edge maintained at the border between the playing field and the grass margin edge.



Fig. 5 Wide grass margins at Sherborne Girls School

4. Wildflower Banks

We recommend leaving the two grass areas uncut - one next to the astro court and the other lawn area at the back of the school where we identified yarrow and eyebright. Also the entire south facing bank at the top of the sports pitches next to the long grass wilding area, in order to allow the sward to grow and to enable us to liberate and identify wildflowers that may naturally be present already in the soil.

5. Litter Pick

Clear all rubbish that has collected in the small woodland area and also in the wilding area at the top of the sports field.

6. Bird Survey

Take a walk around the school grounds and identify as many different birds as possible. Or just count how many birds are seen. Later in the year we can begin butterfly surveys etc - details will be in the manual. Often at the start of rewilding there can be no birds present, or very few. This will change dramatically as the hedgerows regenerate and the grass margins become established.