**Waterfoot Meadow Update**

Thank you again to everyone who has given us positive feedback on the meadow at Waterfoot. This is getting better every year and I will give you a brief update on progress.

On a warm summers day now, the meadow is buzzing with insect life and bird song. We are in year 4 now, and that means the number of species is increasing, providing more food, cover and opportunities for the wildlife that has reached it.

As you walk past the meadow from spring into summer, you will see a mixture of the flowers of Yellow Rattle (Rhinathus minor). This is a hemi-parasite meaning it is stealing nutrients from the grasses, reducing their growth, and providing more space and light for other species to grow. Without this plant, we would have far thicker grass growth and little else to see – not for nothing is it known as the “Meadow Maker!”. The Bumblebees love this flower and pollinate it very effectively so by July the flowers are all replaced by seeds which rattle when shaken, ready to be shed and create next year’s plants.

In amongst this plant are many others – most noticeable are the tall white flowers of Ox-Eye Daisy and purple flowers of Lesser Knapweed. The first of these produces enormous amounts of pollen and the latter huge volumes of nectar, so they are a great food source for insects. Scattered in the well-drained areas are the flowers of Salad Burnet, Birds Foot Trefoil, Kidney vetch, Wild Carrot, Creeping Cinquefoil and Self Heal. This is an unusual community of plants for Rossendale as it is showing that our soil here is dry, well drained, and alkaline. A casual observation for the rest of our valley will tell you it is generally wet, poorly drained, and acidic. I think this must have something to do with the history of the site, near the old railway line and the large amount of builders’ rubble that is just under the soils surface here.

Another consequence of this unusual soil is our population of Bee Orchids which is slowly increasing. We now have about 5 of these, although nibbling by the feral sheep in the valley is damaging them. Last year, we also had one plant of the Common Spotted Orchid and one of the Broad Leaved Helleborine orchid – so 3 wild orchid species were living in the grass just waiting for the chance to grow and flower. Sadly, the Common Spotted orchid was also eaten by the sheep this year, but it will be back again in 2024.

We have planted a number of trees as well, to provide cover and shade. Thank you to Councillor Julie Adshead from Rossendale Borough Council for providing these as part of the effort to plant 16000 trees across the valley by 2025.

Bumblebees of several species are now regular visitors, including the Red tailed, White Tailed, Common Carder and Tree Bumblebees. Leaf Cutter and Mining Bees are feeding in the meadow, and we are also seeing several butterfly species such as Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Common Blue and Large Skippers.

There are many different birds flying around, although none have used our nest boxes yet. We are seeing Kingfishers, Dippers and Grey wagtails in the river quite frequently.

So, all in all the meadow has been easy to make, inexpensive and has saved all the carbon emissions from a reduced cutting regime. We hope you enjoy it during your walk past the surgery, or if you need to visit us. If you are interested in creating a wilder space in your garden, or in encouraging a little more wildness in Rossendale, then please get in touch.

**Dr Cowdery – June 2023**