

Wildflowers for communities

A case study on the benefits and opportunities of creating a wildflower meadow habitats for community outreach and engagement



University of Exeter

Environment and Sustainability Institute



Trevisker Community Meadow case study

Who is this case study for?

This case study is designed to inform and inspire landowners, land managers and people looking to rent land to create wildflower meadow spaces for communities. This case study also provides examples of the economic, environmental, and engagement opportunities that wildflower meadows for communities could have for organisations and businesses in Cornwall and beyond.



Rob and Emily Stevenson and Sian and Mark Sandry, (Emma-Jayne Rothwell photographer), Co-directors of Trevisker Community Meadow CIC.

Aims of the project:

- Create space for wildlife and enhance pollinator resources and populations.
- Provide a sense of community and improve mental health amongst volunteers.
- Educate people on the importance of connecting with nature.

Trevisker Community Meadow CIC

Father and daughter team Rob and Emily Stevenson, started Beach Guardian in 2017 to encourage people to get involved with beach cleans and help businesses with policy issues and research. The 'Bee Guardian' project was formed in late 2018 as an offshoot group, inspired by the many bees that needed conservation support in the local area. In late 2018, Emily and Rob teamed up with their local Garden Centre, Trevisker and offered them a large polytunnel as a hub for their volunteer and school-focused activities. The hub was situated in a large field at the back of the Garden Centre which had remained fallow for three years. In 2019, Trevisker Community Meadow was born when Emily and Rob decided to lease the field with Mark and Sian Sandry the Garden Centre owners, and Emma-Jayne Rothwell founding team member of the Lost Gardens of Heligan and the Eden Project. The aim was to turn it into a community wildflower meadow and create a not-for-profit Community Interest Company.

More about the project from Rob:

The inspiration:

After running Beach Guardian for a few years, Rob and Emily decided they wanted to "... do things in a different environment.", thus the plans for a wildflower meadow to host their community and schools workshops in, a 'Bee Guardian' project began. With support from sponsors after launching a successful Crowdfunder campaign to raise money for the meadow was created in 2019.

The seed mix used:

The Trevisker team wanted to use a diverse species mix to maximise the biodiversity value of the meadow. The team chose a legume (flowers in the pea family) rich 'Nectar and Pollen mixture' which would greatly benefit bumblebees and honeybees and supplemented this with a mix of 25 species of wildflowers and four species of grass, all from South West Seeds. The team then used local contractors to prepare the field for sowing and to distribute the seed using a seed drill.

The collaborations:

Trevisker Community Meadow collaborated with the University of Exeter's Wildflower Collective project funded by the Halpin Trust which has "been invaluable", as they provided advice, resources as well as funding for further wildflower projects (see Wildflowers as a crop – Trevisker Community Meadow case study) and students to help with insect identification.

As part of the Wildflower Collective project, infographics were created and placed around the meadow to educate visitors on wildflowers and wildlife. The infographics also included a QR code, providing a link to an online survey allowing visitors to give their feedback on the meadow and any suggestions for future projects in the community.



An information board created with help from the University of Exeter and the Halpin Trust. It was produced for public education featuring a QR code for an online survey to allow people to provide feedback on the work done by the community.

The Trevisker Community Meadow team have also been able to collaborate with the NHS Trust and some mental health charities to deliver volunteer days for NHS workers and individuals suffering from mental health since Covid-19. Moreover, volunteer work and educational days have been carried out with local schools and colleges to encourage younger people to connect with nature. For all of these workshops the Trevisker team "were fortunate that we did have a little bit of funding" and hope to be able to continue to make these days accessible to as many people as possible without charging for it.

Trevisker also enlisted the expertise of Simon Miles from the Forest Garden based near Falmouth to provide expert plans for the shelter belt and tree planting.

In 2022, Age UK celebrated its Golden Jubilee in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly and wanted to encourage their volunteers and beneficiaries to partake in growing wildflowers. To do this, they collaborated with Trevisker Community Meadow, who donated 1000 packets of corncockle in the spring and summer months and a further 2500 packets of corn marigolds for the autumn and winter. Using the hashtag #seedcornwall the team hopes to spread further awareness of this project and promote sales of their new wildflower seed crop (see Wildflowers as a crop – Trevisker Community Meadow case study).

Seed packets of corncockle donated to Age Uk as part of their 50 year anniversary as a charity in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly



Benefits of a wildflower meadow

Economic:

- Attracts businesses for staff volunteer days and sponsors
- Provides a location to conduct new projects and gain grants.
- Attracts visitors to the Garden Centre providing a space to sit, picnic and walk their dogs.

Engagement:

- New unique space created for outdoor activities and workshops.
- Stronger sense of community through the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Provides an example of wildflower meadow creation for visitors to the garden centre, local farmers and businesses.
- Opportunities to teach new skills in workshops.

Environment:

- Habitats created for nature from meadow and pond creation and tree planting.
- Increase numbers of pollinators and birds.
- Better soil health and reduction in pollution as no chemicals or fertilisers used

The results:

With support from sponsors and donors the Trevisker Community Meadow team were able to create a 4.5-acre wildflower meadow and increase the benefits to wildlife by gaining funding from Tevi, a Cornish project that encourages economic and environmental growth, to create a pond, and working with the Forest for Cornwall initiative, Woodland Trust and Conservation Volunteers to plant tree saplings in the meadows.

Trevisker Community Meadow is now a nature-rich space to host business, volunteer and school workshops on nature, health and well-being and have engaged with people aged between 18 months to over 80 years old.


The benefits of a wildflower meadow:

Engagement gains:

A key benefit of Trevisker Community Meadow was to provide people with a sense of community following the Covid-19 pandemic. They achieved this through public events and volunteer work with groups, encouraging communities to come together and work together on conservation projects like planting trees. The meadow has given people a place with refreshing, attractive natural views to exercise and meet outdoors, with many visiting the area to walk dogs and reconnect with nature after the pandemic. The wildflower meadow has been inspiring others to create space for wildflowers at home “what it's doing is people are going home and thinking...I'll leave an area of my garden. Because sitting and watching grass is one thing, but sitting and seeing activity on the wildflowers, is a completely different experience, and once people have seen it, they want to go back home and do more.”.

The volunteer events have encouraged people to take up new hobbies and learn new skills, with NHS staff, Girlguide groups, scouts and people who suffer from mental health volunteering at the community meadow to plant seeds, build the pond and plant trees. Local businesses have also been approached to get their staff involved in volunteer days as a way of building team morale and decreasing stress levels.

To make the most of the community meadow for its health and well-being benefits, Rob wanted to “Focus on the 5 ways of well-being in young people ...” and do activities with the local schools and nurseries; helping them to get active, interact with nature, be inquisitive, get involved with events and being a part of their community. This approach has inspired the children visiting the meadow to learn new skills and demonstrates the value of nature and how it can be protected whilst allowing them to have fun: “they were, just about walking, only about eighteen months old, so just for them to wander around and pick flowers and see the butterflies, and get their first experience of nature, it's been a success!”.



“It's lovely hearing the crickets, and seeing them hopping about, and seeing all these bees, bumblebees, and enjoying the wild flower mix that has gone down.”

Rob Stevenson, Co-founder and Co-director
of Trevisker Community Meadow CIC

Environmental gains:

For the Trevisker Community Meadow team "It was really important for us to reintroduce species and see what would happen, to see which butterflies and other insects would come.", the creation of the meadow has resulted in a range of insects such as honeybees, bumblebees, beetles, hoverflies and butterflies now resident in the meadow. In particular, the addition of cornflowers in the meadow and as a crop in the adjacent field have proven helpful for enhancing bumblebee numbers which have been seen in abundance feeding on the blue flowers. The meadow is also now home to colonies of the Cornish dark honeybees as of May 20th 2022.

Birdlife has also benefitted from the meadow creation and the increase in insect and flower seed food, with the local farmers seeing "... more birds coming around, especially when you put the wildlife Pond in ... There are swifts now ...", with some nesting nearby, frequently visiting the meadows to feed.

Aside from wildlife, the Trevisker team have anecdotally seen improvement in the soil quality and health within the meadow, there is less soil erosion and the wildflowers have been able to regrow and spread without human intervention, aided by birds and pollinators.

Stopping chemical usage has improved soil health within the meadows by allowing the natural accumulation and removal of nutrients needed for the plants present. As wildflower meadows can sequester carbon from the atmosphere and lock it into the soil, the meadow will become a carbon sink and store.

The Trevisker team hope that by providing an exemplary site of a community meadow and running more workshops and events more people will be encouraged to sow their wildflower meadows across their farms, in their communities and their gardens at home.



Common blue butterfly photographed in on cornflowers (*Centaurea cyanus*) in Trevisker Community Meadow

Economic gains:

Trevisker Community Meadow is a not-for-profit Community Interest Company and therefore does not focus on making economic gains, however, it does need to cover the costs of the workshops and activities that it runs and the management of the meadow. Having the wildflower meadow as a novel workshop space has many economic benefits. It provides a unique location to conduct new projects and new avenues for grant funding can be explored around pollinator conservation and connecting to nature. It also attracts businesses who might want to have staff volunteer days or be sponsors of Trevisker Community Meadow. As an example, most of the meadow workshops have so far been paid for by project grants and the establishment of the meadow itself was supported by 43 donors raising over £8,500 over 37 days on a Crowdfunder campaign. Showing that funds can be raised collectively to start community meadow projects.

The wildflower meadow may also have economic benefits to the surrounding businesses, being situated directly off the main road into Padstow, the meadow may attract visitors to the Garden Centre as it provides a restful space to take a break from driving, even have a picnic and walk their dogs in, adding value to what is already available at the Garden Centre. One visitor to Trevisker Community Meadow reported that it was “Nice to see so many insects.” and that the best part of visiting the meadow was “The peace and escaping for a short time.”.

“It's worth it alone, to just to see all of those insects that have just come and have thrived... you hear about the decline of these and other insects and birds and things that feed on these and you just think it's just something that has to be done!”.

Rob Stevenson, Co-founder and co-director of Trevisker Community Meadow CIC

Final thoughts

We advise that organisations looking to take inspiration from this case study who are interested in exploring the opportunity of wildflower meadows should seek independent advice from their financial advisor and agronomist.

Conclusions:

- Wildflower meadows provide a unique space to conduct workshops and outreach activities in.
- Wildflower meadows offer opportunities for nature focussed as well as mental health and well-being activities.
- A range of wildlife is benefitting from meadow creation at Trevisker Community Meadow including insects and birds.
- The meadow is providing an opportunity for the community to work together and to engage local businesses in nature, health and wellbeing.
- With a focus on volunteers, the possibility for volunteer-run projects is endless "There's always something that can be done!"
- By teaming up with a range of organisations such as the University of Exeter, the NHS Trust, and Age UK, as well as local businesses the Trevisker Community Meadow team can make the most of opportunities as they arrive.

This case study was created thanks to funding from the Halpin Trust and with the help of Rob Stevenson at Trevisker Community Meadow CIC.

November 2022

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Photos by Trevisker Community Meadow CIC