

County Antrim

Antrim is a county of steep wooded glens, rolling farmland and a rocky coastline. With the longest stretch of coast in the country, the county is probably most famous for its iconic landmarks, including the Giant's Causeway and Rathlin Island. Our featured project, however, sees us travelling inland, as Antrim also has some of the richest wildlife verges in the country, home to many important species of plants and invertebrates.

Case study

Don't Mow, Let it Grow

Nature is vital to our well-being, not only because of the physical and mental health benefits it offers, but also for the services, such as pollination, that it provides²². Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council has been working hard across both Antrim and Derry to improve the wildlife value of its land, and to help local people and visitors to reconnect with the natural environment.

Over the past five years, the Council has worked with local community groups and organisations to develop a range of

projects, including creating a nectar-rich wild flower area for both visitors and pollinators to enjoy. An area of unused grassland, complete with pollinator-friendly flowerbed, has also been opened up to provide the local community with much needed green space. In addition, the Council now has five conservation grazing paddocks on coastal sites, three of which are within Special Areas of Conservation (SACs); the grazing regime contributes directly to the positive management and protection of these sites.

Wild bees need pockets of flower-rich habitat across the landscape to provide them with a diverse diet and nesting areas. While common perennial wild flowers like clovers, vetches and knapweeds are excellent food sources, many bedding plants and annuals are not rich in pollen or nectar, and provide little support to our pollinators. Evidence shows that patches planted with wild flower seed mix had 25-times more flowers, 50-times more bumblebees, and 13-times more hoverflies, compared to plots where wild flower seed had not been sown²³. Research also shows that dandelions and white clover are important for bumblebees, honeybees, solitary bees and hoverflies²⁴. These results suggest that the most cost-effective way for the Council to help pollinators is to increase the wild flowers that grow naturally within the landscape, and retain or create natural nesting habitat.

As a result, the Council is embarking on a partnership project with Transport NI and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), called Don't Mow Let it Grow. This project is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Landfill Communities Fund, and will investigate how different management of road verges and amenity grassland can be used to benefit grassland species. Hopefully, it will not only change the way we manage our grasslands, but also encourage the wider public to embrace the benefits of traditional grassland management compared to short manicured grass.

To find out more, visit dontmowletitgrow.com

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Wild flowers are excellent food sources for bees