**St Michael’s Church, Smethcott SO449993**

**A Wildlife Survey by Strettons Area Community Wildlife Group (SACWG)**

Report by Caroline Uff

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Image: C.Uff

**Introduction**

St Michael’s Church is situated in a very rural location at the end of a narrow lane near the village of Smethcott. It is surrounded on three sides by a hedge and has fine views across the Shropshire countryside.

**Survey details**

On 21/6/2014 members of SACWG assessed the site.

**Ground Flora**: Species were recorded from a general walkover. Ferns were also identified.

**Trees**: A sketch map was made of the churchyard showing the positions of the main trees.

**Mammals**: A baited hedgehog tunnel was left for two nights to collect mammal footprints. Tracks and signs of other mammals were also recorded. Bats were not assessed.

**Birds**: Any birds seen or heard either within churchyard were recorded. Those seen in flight were only recorded if it seemed likely they were using the site. Signs of nesting were noted.

**Invertebrates**: Species encountered/ netted were identified as far as possible.

**Reptile mats**: Two mats (felt roofing tiles) were left *in situ* for around the period of the visit to act as refuges for reptiles.

**Results and comments**

In all 106 species were recorded and summarised below – the full list is given in the appendix.

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|  | **# Species recorded** | **Comments** |
| **Ground Flora** | **52 (+2 lichens)** | With the exception of some shaded areas, the grassland was mown very short little flowering. Despite this there were still signs of traditional meadow species persisting, such as bird’s-foot-trefoil, oxeye daisy, pignut, meadow vetchling and common knapweed. These species, typical of old flower rich meadows are becoming a rare sight in our countryside and should be treasured. |
| **Trees** | **14** | Predominantly native with some nice mature trees, but including some non-native species too. |
| **Birds** | **10** | It was lovely to see swallows nesting in the porch. A red kite was flying overhead. |
| **Invertebrates** | **22** | This number was low, probably due to the absence of flowering plants (nectar source) in the churchyard. |
| **Mammals** | **6** | Signs of a good number of mammals were recorded, including an active badger sett. |
| **Reptiles** | **0** |  |
| **Grassland Category** |  | The ground flora was categorised as semi- improved neutral grassland of moderate diversity, using the churchyard companion (CfGA). |



The diversity of the grassland was very good despite all being regularly mown. It appeared that the clippings had been mostly raked off which is good practice and may explain why the grassland remained so diverse.

Where access to tend graves is not a priority, there may be the opportunity to leave a section of the open species rich grassland unmown between April and mid-July to allow these increasingly uncommon meadow species to flower and set seed. This is done in many churchyards and the grassland at Smethcott certainly has the potential to provide a very attractive splash of summer colour as well as providing nectar and shelter for a range of insects, which in turn are a food source for birds and other animals. For example, the bird’s-foot trefoil pictured left was present in the grass near the entrance. Details of managing longer grassland are in the ‘*managing churchyards &burial grounds’* action pack available for free download on the Caring for God’s Acre website <http://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/>

Image : <http://northeastwildlife.co.uk/>

The shady areas had some nice woodland species such as bluebell. A small area of long grass with some brash had been left, and although this will provide good cover for small mammals, it was quite shady and there was little of botanical interest. The taller shrub areas were clumped which provides good refuge for birds. A rough sketch map was made of the churchyard showing positions of most tree species.

C:\Users\Caroline\Pictures\Churchyards\Smethcott\map.tif

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| **Group** | **Plant name** |
| Flowers | Bird's-foot-trefoil |
| Flowers | Bluebell |
| Flowers | Bramble |
| Flowers | Buttercup, creeping |
| Flowers | Buttercup, meadow |
| Flowers | Campion, red |
| Flowers | Cat's-ear |
| Flowers | Cleavers |
| Flowers | Clover, red |
| Flowers | Clover, white |
| Flowers | Chickweed, common |
| Flowers | Creeping Thistle |
| Flowers | Current |
| Flowers | Daisy |
| Flowers | Dandelions |
| Flowers | Dock, broad-leaved |
| Flowers | Dog/field Rose |
| Flowers | Dog's mercury |
| Flowers | Dog-violet, common |
| Flowers | Ground ivy |
| Flowers | Hawkeed sp |
| Flowers | Hogweed |
| Flowers | Honeysuckle |
| Flowers | Ivy |
| Flowers | Knapweed, common |
| Flowers | Lady's smock |
| Flowers | Nipplewort |
| Flowers | Oxeye daisy |
| Flowers | Pignut |
| Flowers | Pimpernel, scarlet |
| Flowers | Primrose |
| Flowers | Snowberry |
| Flowers | Sorrel, common |
| Flowers | Speedwell, germander |
| Flowers | Stinging nettle |
| Flowers | Stitchwort, greater |
| Flowers | Stitchwort, lesser |
| Flowers | Strawberry, barren |
| Flowers | Strawberry, wild |

Plants recorded 2014 (English names used where possible)

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| **Group** | **Plant name** |
| Flowers | Thistle, spear |
| Flowers | Vetch, bush |
| Flowers | Vetch, common |
| Flowers | Vetchling, meadow |
| Flowers | Willowherb, broad-leaved |
| Flowers | Willowherb, rosebay |
| Flowers | Woundwort, hedge |
| Flowers | Yarrow |
| Ferns | Bracken |
| Grasses | Cock's foot grass |
| Grasses | Fescue red |
| Grasses | Hairgrass, wavy |
| Grasses | Yorkshire-fog |
| Lichens | Caloplaca citrina (tbc) |
| Lichens | Caloplaca teicholyta (tbc) |
| Trees and Shrubs | Blackthorn |
| Trees and Shrubs | Cedar sp |
| Trees and Shrubs | Cypress sp |
| Trees and Shrubs | Elder |
| Trees and Shrubs | Guelder Rose |
| Trees and Shrubs | Hawthorn |
| Trees and Shrubs | Hazel |
| Trees and Shrubs | Holly |
| Trees and Shrubs | Oak |
| Trees and Shrubs | Ornamental cherry |
| Trees and Shrubs | Scots Pine |
| Trees and Shrubs | Sycamore |
| Trees and Shrubs | Wych elm |
| Trees and Shrubs | Yew |

Animals recorded 2014 (English names used where possible)

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| --- | --- |
| **Group** | **Animal name** |
| Bird | Blackbird |
| Bird | Chaffinch |
| Bird | Chiff chaff |
| Bird | Goldcrest |
| Bird | Goldfinch |
| Bird | House Martin |
| Bird | Nuthatch |
| Bird | Robin |
| Bird | Swallow (nesting) |
| Bird | Red Kite |
| Coleoptera (Beetles) | leaf beetle, *Gastrophysa viridula* |
| Diptera (Flies) | soldier fly, *Sargus iridatus* |
| Diptera (Flies) | hoverfly, *Episyrphus balteatus* |
| Diptera (Flies) | hoverfly, *Eristalis pertinax* |
| Diptera (Flies) | hoverfly, *Eristalis horticola* |
| Diptera (Flies) | fly, Yellow dung |
| Hymenoptera (Ants, bees and wasps) | solitary wasp, *Crossocerus elongatulus* |
| Hymenoptera (Ants, bees and wasps) | solitary wasp, *Crossocerus dimidiatus* |
| Hymenoptera (Ants, bees and wasps) | solitary wasp, *Crossocerus megacephalus* |
| Hymenoptera (Ants, bees and wasps) | solitary wasp, *Ectemnius continuus* |
| Hymenoptera (Ants, bees and wasps) | Ruby-tailed wasp, *Chrysis sp* |
| Hymenoptera (Ants, bees and wasps) | bumblebee, Buff-tailed |
| Hymenoptera (Ants, bees and wasps) | cuckoo bumblebee*, Bombus sylvestris* |
| Hymenoptera (Ants, bees and wasps) | bumblebee, Early |
| Hymenoptera (Ants, bees and wasps) | Honey bee |
| Hymenoptera (Ants, bees and wasps) | solitary bee, *Andrena carantonica* |
| Hymenoptera (Ants, bees and wasps) | Tree wasp |
| Hymenoptera (Ants, bees and wasps) | bumblebee, White-tailed |
| Lepidoptera (Butterflies and moths) | moth, Nettle tap |
| Mammal | mouse/vole (footprints) |
| Mammal | Mole (hills) |
| Mammal | Rabbit (droppings) |
| Mammal | Fox (droppings) |
| Mammal | Badger (sett) |
| Mites | mite, Blackthorn gall, *Eriophyes similis* |
| Snail | snail, Common garden |
| Snail | snail, White lipped garden |