

Climate and Ecological Emergency Report, July 2022.

After the recent spell of record-breaking hot temperatures, there can be few climate change deniers left. Any that there are will probably now join forces with the proponents of the flat earth hypothesis, believers in unicorns and their ilk.

However, we need to remind ourselves of the scale and rapidity of this change. Nine of the hottest ten years in the UK have been since 1990. The average July temperature in the 1970's was 18.7C, in the 2010's it was 20C. That is FAST! We should remember that if we want to avoid the worst effects of climate change, the best estimates are that we should limit the extent of warming to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels. We're getting close!

Governments of course have a major role to play in limiting this increase. However, we all need to buy in to this and to take personal responsibility for making changes to our personal life choices. There is advice aplenty out there about what you can do. Remember, every time we chose to buy a new coat, mobile phone or piece of gadgetry, that will require the use of natural resources and energy. Those processes will add to global warming. So, ask yourself: "Do I really NEED that new iPhone?"

As a community we are making our own small contribution to making the UK more resilient to the effects of climate change by managing the natural assets of the Parish in such a way as to encourage more biodiversity. Let's look at one of those contributions: our tree plantation along the north eastern verge of the A388.

Tree Plantation.

Some of the trees are showing signs of heat stress, as is to be expected given the extreme heat, but most seem to be thriving. I suspect this is because the site is quite poorly drained, and so retains moisture well. In several places we actually have rushes growing there.

Many thanks to volunteer **Adam Windrum** who strimmed around the trees in June.

As well as the trees growing there we also have numerous wildflowers. Clearing the dense cover of brambles that were there has allowed the seeds of these flowers (probably lying dormant for decades) to be exposed to light and germinate. A recent count, by no means exhaustive or detailed, identified the following 20 species:

- Greater knapweed
- Hedge bedstraw
- Fleabane
- Buttercup
- Yarrow
- Teazel
- Hemp agrimony
- Self-heal
- Marsh thistle
- Narrow-leaved plantain
- Meadowsweet

- Dovesfoot cranesbill
- Foxglove
- Greater willowherb
- Fumitory
- Oxeye daisy
- Red bartsia
- Wild carrot
- Birdsfoot trefoil
- Common vetch

Unintended consequences can often be quite negative, but here we have an example of how a simple change (clearing a dense bramble thicket) can bring benefits.

The Environment Agency has published a report ("*Working with Nature*" July 2022) which lays bare the scale of change needed to halt England's biodiversity and climate crisis. Most people now accept that we are in a climate emergency which needs serious action to halt, and hopefully reverse. What is less well known and publicized is that the climate emergency is happening at the same time as an unprecedented threat to the whole ecosystem that supports life on earth.

We have always assumed that each year will bring the harvests we need to sustain us all through the year till the next harvest. The report alerts us to the fact that this assumption can no longer be relied on to continue. The biodiversity crisis joins the climate crisis as an existential risk to our survival.

This crisis is a global issue. The loss of habitats and their associated flora and fauna, which is largely the result of human activity, is seen in every corner of the world. The situation is particularly acute in the UK, which is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world due to its long history of industrialisation and land use changes. We often think of England as a green and pleasant land, and it is. However, that greenness is deceptive, and hides a sterility that is very worrying. The green fields in our parish are mostly green monocultures that consist solely of maize, barley, potatoes or rye grass. Farmers have done a very good job of eliminating any competition in the shape of wildflowers, or weeds as they are called. This would be fine if there were sizeable refuges of untouched and untamed nature for our native flora and fauna to thrive in. Sadly, this is not the case.

The answer is not necessarily to create more large national parks (many of these are equally nature depleted anyway), but to look at ways we can make small scale changes to the way we manage our local neighbourhoods. This is what we as a Parish are trying to do with our community-owned assets like the A388 verge. The greater the biodiversity we have, the more likely it is that some of those species will be able to adapt to a changing climate and allow the pollinators we all depend on to thrive.

[Environment Agency report sets out urgent need to work with nature - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-with-nature)