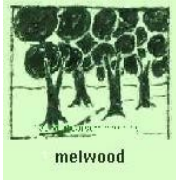


## Melwood work schedule for Autumn 2023



Autumn and winter are the time when the most intensive work goes into management of the Melwood Local Nature Reserve. The summer growth is dead or nearly so, flowers have scattered their seeds and the birds and mammals are preparing for whatever the winter will throw at them. As autumn slides into winter, some plants are already preparing for spring, most notably the great show of Snowdrops, which usually manage one or two flowers as early as New Year. All these factors have to be taken into account as work on the wood is planned but weather can often upset throw a spanner in the works.

With the group given a green light to take a more active role in management of the meadow, although it is not yet formally part of the reserve, the September work party gave the meadow a preliminary 'hair-cut'. This was rendered much harder by the wet condition of the grass and a clean cut was impossible. The lower layers of straw remained flat to the ground and may pose problems for seedlings if we cannot clear much of it by spring. What was cut was raked away to prevent it rotting down *in situ*.

A few dry days in October gave the opportunity to cut a few small areas of the meadow a bit closer and the continuing mild weather coupled with moist soil gave a perfect opportunity to plant some of the many potted wild flowers that the group members have been nurturing over the summer. 8 species were planted, including Foxglove Feverfew, Marjoram and St. John's Wort. We will need to avoid these when cutting the meadow in the spring and summer. When we have better control of the tall grasses, docks and nettles, we will introduce species that can tolerate being cut and will recover to flower again quickly. Honeysuckle was planted along hedge lines. The Yew hedge along the river path has not been cut for many years and was becoming so tall that it was shading much of the meadow in late afternoon, so work was started in bringing that down to the level it had been all those years ago.

Looking forward at the time of writing, the November work party will need to give a light cut and rake to the areas where snowdrops will start to appear during December. Care will also be needed in areas where daffodils may start to appear if the weather remains mild. Also in November, we should check and clean nest boxes. That will leave them undisturbed over winter to provide shelter if needed before they become occupied for the breeding season. This is a moveable task but must be completed by the beginning of February.

During the remainder of the winter, the group will need to clear the floor of the wood, making space for a range of spring species. Any coppicing needed to create light or regenerate overgrown bushes will also take place before March.

Anyone interested in joining the conservation group can easily do so via "contact" page of the website.

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Melwood Conservation Group

Website : [www.melwood.org.uk](http://www.melwood.org.uk) This article was published in 'Meldreth Matters', December 2023