

WILDLIFE AND WILDFLOWER SURVEYS



LAND

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WHY?

'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it' (Psalm 24:1)

If we are familiar with the plants and animals in our gardens and churchyards, we can take better action to help them. Surveying provides us with valuable information about the plants and animals in our area; it is also of enormous help to national conservationists. 'Citizen science' (the public participating in scientific research, usually by collecting data) reveals the bigger picture and informs decision-making on a larger scale. Lots of people's individual contributions can add up to make a big impact.

Churchyards and burial grounds can be havens for rare species, as they are often ancient sites which have had continuous care, and few chemical additives such as fertilizers and herbicides. It's a great message for us as Christians that land set aside as a burial ground provides life to threatened and marginalised species: <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/biodiversity/>

HOW?

First, ask what you hope to achieve with your survey, for example:

- Do you want to create a detailed baseline list of plants and animals that live in your space so you can educate your church?
- Do you want to be able to track the change in numbers of species year by year as a result of decisions made in the management process?
- Do you want to have a family-oriented event of discovery? If so, you can find more information in our nature discovery resource.



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WILDLIFE AND BOTANICAL SURVEYS

You don't need to be an expert! Anyone with a good knowledge of common wildflowers and wildlife can do a survey. Visit the space and record everything you can identify (English common names are fine!). Take some field guides with you and see if you can learn about a new species as well. Surveys can be done any time of year, but you'll find different species in different seasons, so it could be interesting to do one every season. Always remember to record the date, time, surveyors' names and as much species information as possible ('blackbird' is valuable information while 'bird' is not specific enough to be useful).

Your local wildlife trust or other local conservation charity may be able to support you and provide some guidance for your survey. Find your local group here: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-trusts>

EASY BOTANICAL SURVEY METHOD

- Draw a map of your space and identify the different types of habitat (long grass, trees, very shaded etc.).
- Choose an area, mark out a simple 2m x 2m square, then try to identify every plant within the square.
- Repeat for various types of area within your space.
- Use the *Caring for God's Acre Botanical Companion* (available in English and Welsh) for a list of frequently found species to determine the quality and type of your grassland area:

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/starterguide-2/>

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/the-burial-ground-botanical-companion/>



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NATIONAL VEGETATION CLASSIFICATION (NVC) METHOD

- Draw a map and on it mark out different areas of vegetation.
- Randomly choose 3–5 points within each area, and then identify plants by the percentage covered in your 2x2m square.
- Use one of the free data analysis programmes provided to determine NVC classification:
http://www.magnificentmeadows.org.uk/assets/pdfs/How_to_do_an_NVC_Survey.pdf

WILDLIFE SURVEY METHOD

First choose what you want to survey. Then to plan your surveying, determine the best season and time of day that will be best to spot wildlife. For example, for a bird survey, morning or evening during the breeding season (March–September) is best. Or why not participate in a national citizen science survey scheme? <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/actions/how-take-part-citizen-survey>

Some surveys which could be easily conducted on your church's land:

- Big Garden Birdwatch with the RSPB (annually in January) – <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/birdwatch/>
- Garden Butterfly Survey with Butterfly Conservation (monthly throughout the year) – <https://www.gardenbutterflysurvey.org/>
- Bats in Churches with Bat Conservation Trust (at least once in summer) – <https://batsinchurches.org.uk/get-involved/volunteer-bat-survey/>
- Every Flower Counts with Plantlife (annually in May) – <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/everyflowercounts/>
- Swift Mapper through the RSPB (annually in summer), to record swifts – <https://www.rspb.org.uk/our-work/conservation/conservation-and-sustainability/safeguarding-species/swiftmapper/>
- Hedgehog Map with Hedgehog Street, to record hedgehog sightings – <https://bighedgehogmap.org/>
- Bumblebee monitoring – <http://www.bloomsforbees.co.uk/>



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LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

The Field Studies Council produce some excellent identification field guides:

https://www.field-studies-council.org/product-category/publications/?fwp_publication_type=fold-out-guide

Watch this webinar on how to do biological recording recorded during 'Churches Count on Nature' week 2021: <https://youtu.be/HqjWqdBAXGY>

Read how Citizen Science is transforming research:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07106-5>

<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/citizen-science/>