

Blackness Castle: Wildlife Habitat Enhancement

Introduction

As part of the [Inner Forth Landscape Initiative](#) and the [Ecoco Life](#) project, RSPB Scotland is working with land managers to create small scale habitats that will benefit local wildlife. We have been working with farmers, golf courses and owners of historic buildings to plant wildflower meadows, install nestboxes and identify other opportunities that could help establish wildlife networks throughout the landscape.

We have identified opportunities within Blackness Castle for small scale habitat creation and are eager to develop these. Below are details of proposed projects which could take place in the spring of 2017. As this project is fully funded there would be no cost to HES and RSPB Scotland would advise on any future management required.

Wildflower Meadow Creation

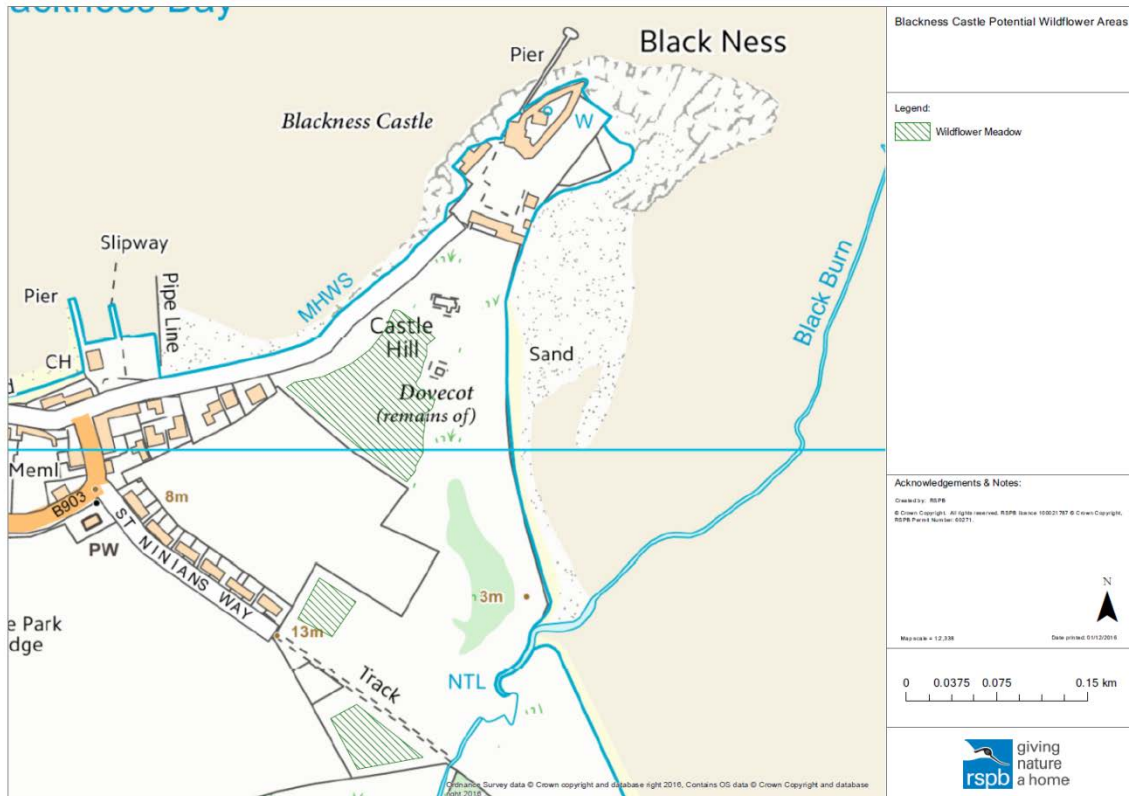
Wildflower meadows have declined by around 97% in the UK since the 1930s, with evidence to suggest that 40% were lost in Scotland between 1983 and 2005. As such, there is currently a lot of interest from conservation bodies in the creation and restoration of species-rich grasslands.

Beyond the benefits to our native flora and fauna that arise through the creation of wildflower meadows, at the height of summer - when wildflowers are in full bloom - the variety of colours on display can provide a stunning visual spectacle. When carefully planned and located, to take into account current site use and landscape features, these newly-created areas of species-rich grasslands could enhance the aesthetics of chosen sites as well as broadening the appeal of sites and being used to advertise.

Much of the area around Blackness Castle is dominated by amenity grassland which, while providing important space for people, is of little value to wildlife. We propose that 3 wildflower plots, totalling over 1ha, are planted within this amenity grassland area to create a habitat with an abundance of nectar and pollen that will benefit local wildlife and provide a visual spectacle for visitors during the summer months. RSPB would provide all the seed and equipment to create the meadows, and undertake the work with contractors to create the meadows.

A further small pure wildflower plot could be created within the castle itself on an area of disused land to the east of the castle. Due to its small size this site could be created by hand with the assistance of volunteers.

The map below shows the area that can be planted with a wildflower meadow mix, this is an initial indication of where planting could take place and can easily be adjusted to account for local needs.



The seed mix for the areas will be a mixture of native grasses and flowers, the exact mix of species will be selected after discussion with local suppliers. The process for creating the meadow will be as follows;

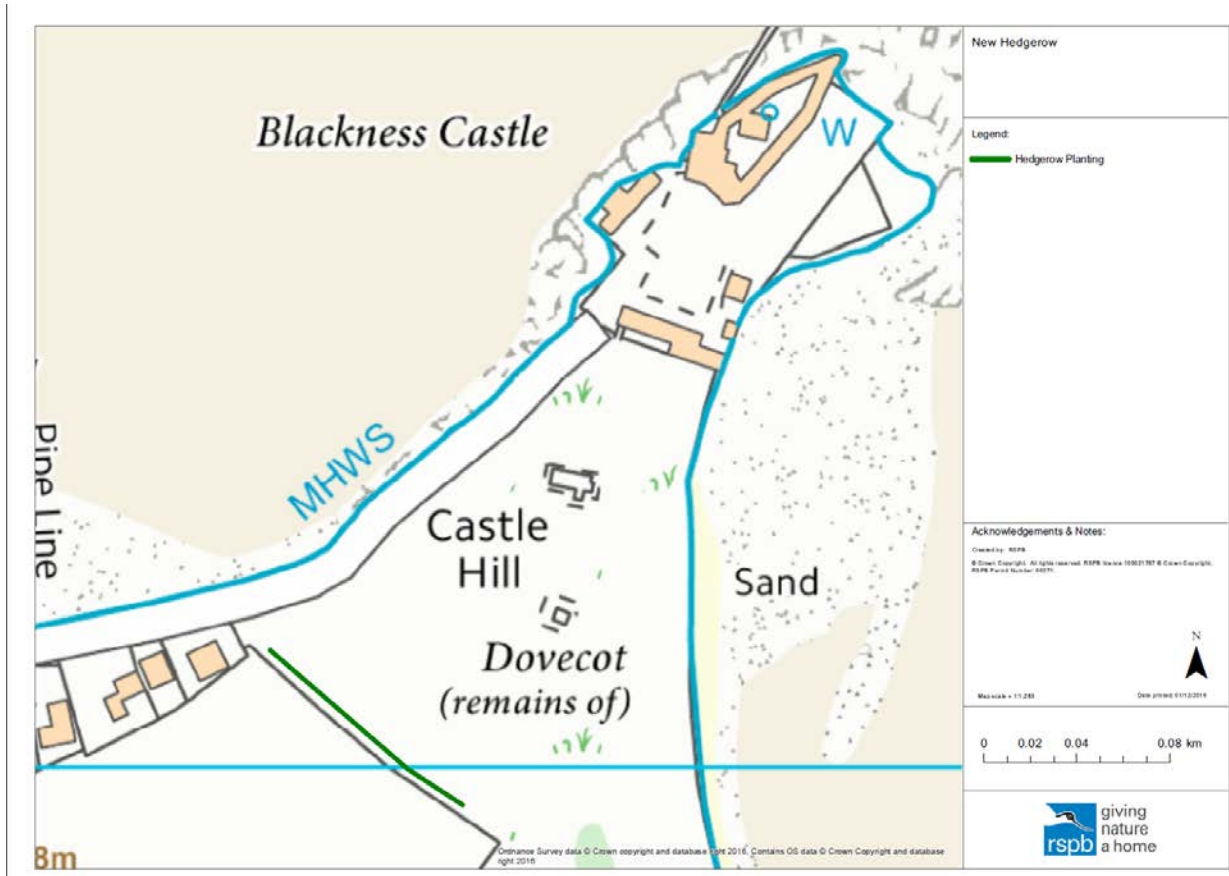
- Spray the area with appropriate weed killer to kill off existing species that would out-compete the newly planted grasses and wildflowers
- Rotovate the area to a depth of 15-20cm to create a fine seed bed
- Spread the seed at a rate of 3g per m²
- The ground should then be rolled to enable contact of seed with the soil.

After the meadow is established, some on-going management is required, this amounts to one cut per year, with the cuttings removed. This is generally the only management required.

A successful wildflower meadow will add colour and interest to the Blackness Castle site, creating an added attraction for people during the summer months. Paths could be cut through the meadow to enable continued access and allow people to experience the wildlife associated with these sites.

Hedgerow Creation

Hedgerows are vitally important for wildlife, providing important refuge and shelter areas, as well as food for many species of bird. Furthermore they can link disparate habitats, providing wildlife corridors through a landscape. Unfortunately, many areas of hedgerow have been lost due to farming intensification leading to bigger fields and the loss of boundary features. It is therefore important to identify new areas for hedgerows which could benefit local wildlife. At Blackness Castle there is an opportunity to create a new hedgerow on the southern part of the site, along the length of an existing fence line, linking up existing scrub habitat. This area is shown in the map below;



To create the hedgerow the following steps would be taken;

- Strim back any existing vegetation
- Lay out a weed suppressant membrane with 3 holes every metre cut in to it for the plants
- Holes for the plants would be dug to 10-15cm
- Plants would be planted in a double row with 50cm between each row.
- Canes and herbivore guards would be attached to plants to protect them from damage.

The selection of hedgerow plants would be based on the bird survey that was undertaken at Blackness last year to ensure the greatest benefit for local species. It is likely the plants will include hawthorn, blackthorn, honeysuckle, dog rose and guilder rose amongst others. The planting work could be undertaken by volunteers.

Nest Boxes

The house sparrow may be one of our most familiar birds however over the past forty years we have seen a decline in this species of around 70%. Due to this decline the house sparrow is red listed as a bird of high conservation concern. One of the simplest things we can do to help the house sparrow is to provide nesting areas through simple measures such as installing nest boxes.

In the grounds around Blackness Castle there are several places where nest boxes could be installed and a simple measure such as this could have a good conservation benefit for the area. Furthermore, there area around Blackness Castle is suitable for two kestrel nestboxes, a species which is amber-listed and could be encourage to nest in the area.

RSPB Scotland would provide the nest boxes and install them as required.

Contact Details

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The RSPB is the country's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home.

The RSPB is a registered charity in England & Wales 207076, in Scotland SC037654

