

# Cornfield Flowers Project



## Species Cards - Introduction



### The Project

The Cornfield Flowers Project was established in 1999, with the sole aim of addressing the dramatic loss of arable wildflowers in north-east Yorkshire that was passing-by unnoticed.

Through painstaking work, some of the last locations for these very rare flowers were found by the Project, seed was collected and new plants grown with the help of local volunteers. Over the years it has been successful in saving several species from extinction, and has improved the fortunes of many more. This unique story is explained below.

### Farming past & present

Cornfield flowers are wild plants adapted to life in arable crop fields, and have featured in our farmed landscape for centuries. Growing amongst cereal crops, they provided rich habitat for insects and a mosaic of colour in our fields.

After the Second World War, the need for more reliable food supplies resulted in many technological advances to increase production. Fertilisers, pesticides and new crop varieties were developed, which greatly increased the amount of food we could produce from the land.



### The threats faced

Unfortunately advances in food production have come at a cost to wildlife. Cornfield flowers, now regarded as undesirable weeds, have been effectively removed from modern crop fields and their numbers have declined alarmingly in the last 60 years. Many are facing extinction, such as Red hemp-nettle and Corn buttercup, and some have been permanently lost from our landscape. Without help, many more will disappear.



## Our work

The project manages a dedicated field at Silpho as a secure site for arable flowers, operates a nursery and demonstration field at the Ryedale Folk Museum and has deposited seed from some of our rarest species with Kew's Millennium Seed Bank.

However, it is only through the support of local communities that we have been able to retain many rare plants in the area. Our volunteer farmers have provided safe-havens in their fields, gardeners and enthusiasts have propagated new plants for re-introduction and local schools have

hosted cornfield beds in their grounds to raise awareness with the next generation. With your help, our challenge now is to maintain this momentum and ensure the Project survives its creators, guarding against the permanent loss of some truly unique, remarkable and beautiful flowers.



## Species Cards

Because of their rare and specialist nature, the arable plants we work with are not commonly understood. To help, we have produced a series of Species Cards that explain a little more about each plant - its rarity, distribution in north-east Yorkshire, growing preferences and our anecdotal experiences of working with them, for better or worse. You can download the cards from:

[www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/looking-after/our-projects/cornfield-flowers-project](http://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk/looking-after/our-projects/cornfield-flowers-project)

## References and further reading

Throughout the species cards, reference is made to a number of key texts. These comprise the definitive floras for north-east Yorkshire, and one for the UK, which present species rarity and distribution in a local or national context. Additionally, Phil Wilson's book provides an excellent resource for wider information on arable wildflowers.

Crackles, E. (1990) *Flora of the East Riding of Yorkshire*. Hull University Press

Preston, C.D, Pearman, D.A, Dines, T.D (Eds) (2002) *New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora*. Oxford University Press

Sykes, N. (1993) *Wild Plants and their Habitats in the North York Moors*. North York Moors National Park

Wilson, P. (2003) *Arable Plants - A Field Guide*. WildGuides Ltd.

The Cornfield Flowers Project is spearheaded by the Carstairs Countryside Trust, Ryedale Folk Museum, North Yorkshire Moors Association and North York Moors National Park Authority. It has a demonstration field and nursery at Ryedale Folk Museum and a working arable field at Silpho, near Scarborough. It is supported by the North York Moors National Park Sustainable Development Fund, North York Moors Coast & Hills LEADER Programme and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

