



Buff-tailed Bumblebee
Bombus terrestris

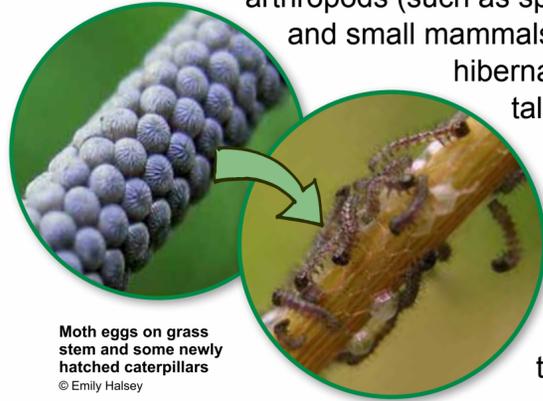
Meadows & Grasslands



Six-spot Burnet
Zygaena filipendulae

The number of meadows in Leicester has seriously declined in the last 60 years and with them the insects, mammals and birds associated with them. Managing the surviving meadows and finding opportunities to create new wildlife lawns and meadows in our parks and green spaces is very important in how we can conserve and encourage our wildlife in Leicester.

These meadows and longer grassland areas are particularly important as they support insects (including butterflies and bees), arthropods (such as spiders and millipedes), birds and small mammals. Wildlife lay their eggs or hibernate over winter amongst the tall grass tussocks.



Moth eggs on grass stem and some newly hatched caterpillars
© Emily Halsey

These areas are an oasis for wildlife attracted to the pollen and nectar of flowering grasses and plants whilst the long grass means they can hide from predators.

Managing Meadows for Wildlife

Meadows are now rare in Leicester so it is important to protect or create meadows in the City. The grass is cut in early spring and then allowed to flower and set seed before being cut again in late July/August.

The grass (now hay) is left to dry to allow the seeds to drop for next years crop, before being baled and removed for use by local farmers and stables.



Common Blue
Polyommatus icarus

Buff-tailed Bumblebee
Bombus terrestris
© Graham Callow



The Plight of the Bumblebee

Pollinating insects such as our bees and wasps have suffered a big decline with about a third of bee colonies lost recently because of our climate, a virus killing mite and increased use of pesticides and herbicides. Cooler summers with thunderstorms make it difficult for insects to fly and collect pollen. Our warmer winters may cause the queen bees to wake from hibernation too early before plants are available to feed on.

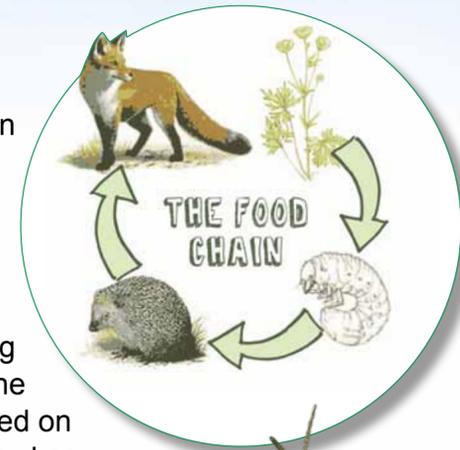


These meadows and longer grasses are vital to help protect the bees and other pollinating insects in Leicester because urban bees are particularly stressed due to pollution from cars and industry, greater numbers of people living in towns or cities and loss of gardens as people pave over green space for parking, housing extensions or decked areas.

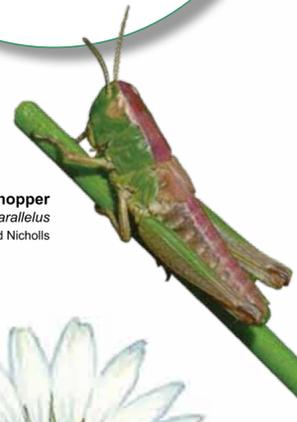
Food Chains and Feeding Frenzies

Some species of insects are specialist feeders and are only attracted to certain plants. Making sure that those plants are present helps to conserve those insects and attract more general feeders. A diverse range of wildflowers and grasses will attract more invertebrates which means more food for the larger animals.

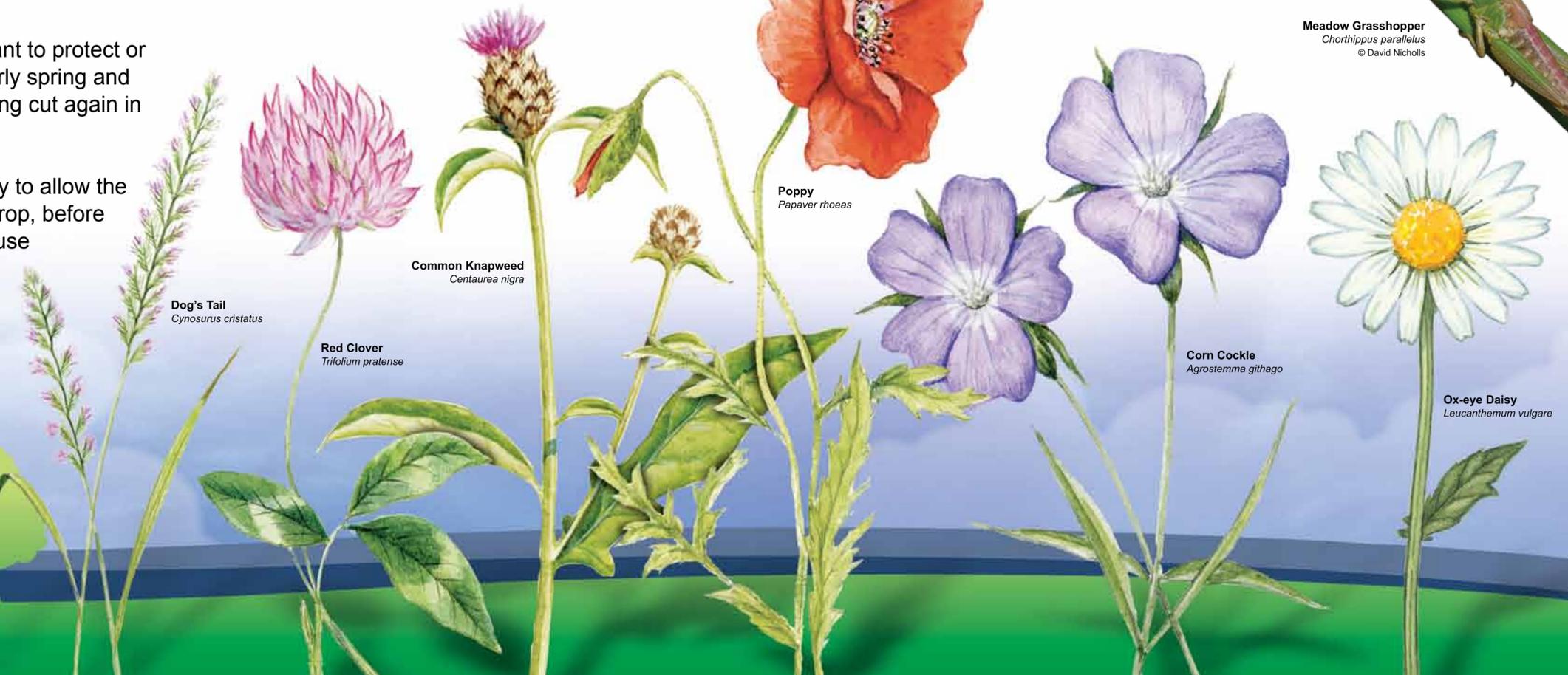
This diagram shows a simple food chain starting at the buttercup eaten by the grubs, which are in turn a good food source for hedgehogs which are hunted by the top predator - usually the fox.



A similar chain exists between flying midges and moths which feed on the plants at night, the bats then feed on the insects, and the tawny owl as the top predator will take bats.



Meadow Grasshopper
Chorthippus parallelus
© David Nicholls



Dog's Tail
Cynosurus cristatus

Red Clover
Trifolium pratense

Common Knapweed
Centaurea nigra

Poppy
Papaver rhoeas

Corn Cockle
Agrostemma githago

Ox-eye Daisy
Leucanthemum vulgare