



SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

Welcome to our June Newsletter

It's been another busy month for the Small is Beautiful project and we hope you enjoy reading about the latest news from the team.

This month's edition includes:

- News about the development of the Site Access Plan
- How you can help tracking pollinators across the Islands
- A look at invasive species
- Case Study of Church Farm, St. Martin's
- Our Featured Partner, the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust
- Arable plant surveys and woodland condition assessments



'Small is Beautiful' and The Trust staff provide a combined project update to St Agnes

Mapping Access for the Small is Beautiful project

Julie Love explains the mapping access work she is undertaking.

As part of the Small is Beautiful project, work is now underway to develop a Site Access Plan; a key document that supports long-term habitat restoration and conservation. These plans help to ensure that everyone involved in the project, from land managers and contractors to scientists and community members, can safely and responsibly access the landscape over the course of the project.

Access planning is particularly important here in the Isles of Scilly, where we work within a complex patchwork of land uses and sensitive habitats.



The Site Access Plan will help us map out existing routes, identify where improvements might be needed, and protect vulnerable areas, wildlife, and heritage features. It also supports key aims around biosecurity and community engagement.

I've spent the last few weeks mapping the access network across the islands, making the most of the beautiful May weather. Along the way, I've been talking to walkers about their experiences — how they navigate the paths, where they find signage helpful (or lacking), and what might make getting around easier or more enjoyable.

Please get in touch directly to arrange a time to chat: julielove.trewince@gmail.com. I'd love to hear your thoughts — whether you have ideas for new routes, concerns about erosion or safety, or suggestions for improving information and signage.

We Need Your Help: Tracking pollinators across the Islands

Pollinators like bees and hoverflies are vital for healthy ecosystems and food production, but many are in decline. As part of the project, we're working to better understand how pollinator populations respond to changes in land use — and we're doing it using a two-pronged approach: cutting-edge technology and citizen science.



Jilly Halliday on Tresco

Over the past few weeks, we've started installing AgriSound "Polly" devices across all the islands, on farmland, Wildlife Trust sites, and public access areas on Tresco. These smart sensors use acoustic technology to detect the sound of insect flight — collecting real-time data on pollinator activity day and night. They're a powerful tool to help us monitor changes over time, and how different management practices, such as wildflower planting, may be supporting insect life.



Jaclyn at Tremelethan Farm

But tech alone isn't enough — we need your help too. By taking part in the [UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme \(UKPoMS\)](https://www.ukpoms.org.uk/), you can contribute vital data through simple surveys like FIT Counts (Flower-Insect Timed Counts). This national scheme helps track pollinator trends across the country and complements our sensor data with observations from people on the ground.



Farmer, Sophie Smith on St Agnes

A big thank you to everyone who joined our recent webinar introducing UKPoMS and how to get involved. If you missed it or would like help getting started, just get in touch — we'd be happy to support you.

Please remember: we're especially looking for counts from farmland (with permission), public access areas on IoSWT land and Tresco, not gardens, so we can build a picture of pollinator health in our project areas.

Together, by combining passive monitoring and community science, we can gather the evidence we need to support better decisions for nature and farming and increase the islands buzz.

Visit: www.ukpoms.org.uk/poms-projects for more information.



On St Mary's, Dave, Artie, Solomon and Elias at Salakee Farm

South West Invasive Species Forum: Insights and Actions for Scilly

Last month, Jaclyn Pearson, Programme Manager, spoke at the South West Invasive Species Forum, Devon. She shared how the Isles of Scilly are building a stronger biosecurity approach through the Small is Beautiful project, focusing on biodiversity, livestock health, tree resilience, and pollinator protection.

Drawing from past success with the rat eradication programme, Jaclyn outlined how islanders are now working together to reduce the risk of new threats like cattle disease, varroa mite, and Dutch elm disease. A highlight of the day was Lynne Ingram's update on the yellow-legged hornet. Her talk reinforced the importance of early detection, strong local networks, and rapid reporting - lessons directly applicable to Scilly.



Jaclyn left, Lynne Ingram middle, and Clare Fitzgibbon, our Project Liaison Officer, Natural England at the South West Invasive Species Forum

Key actions for Scilly now include: enhancing local surveillance, and preparing island-wide response protocols. These next steps will be vital in strengthening island resilience against invasive species.

Featured Partner: Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust

The Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust manages the great majority of the wildlife-rich and publicly accessible land anywhere outside Treviso. Whilst our tenancy makes up around half of the land on Scilly, working with other tenants and organisations through Small is Beautiful is just as important to us.



We graze our land to benefit species-richness, habitat structure and soil health. The movement of our herds around the landscape open up the ground for wildflowers to break through the bracken and bramble cover and encourages dung beetles. In addition to our cattle and goats (and borrowed donkeys) on St Mary's, we are very grateful to work with farms to get our land grazed on St Agnes, Bryher and St Martin's. We see Small is Beautiful as a huge potential boost to all our work to get effective conservation grazing around the islands.

Of course, you can't mention Scilly without the seabirds. The rat free status of St Agnes's has been such a help to breeding petrels and shearwaters. We're working with the local community and partners to see if these benefits can be extended across the rest of the off-isles under the Seabird Recovery Project.

Our islands have the only surviving breeding population of Ringed Plovers this side of Dorset – another beautiful feature of what makes Scilly so special. With help from locals, we're already locating more plover nests to protect and monitor with the added bonus of gaining some incredible trail camera footage to further UK-wide research on nesting behaviour. Together we're looking to manage recreational access to make sure that people and nesting birds can both enjoy our beaches.

The Trust has launched its 'Protect our Plovers, be a Plover Lover!' campaign. If you would like to know more or make a donation, please visit their [appeal page](http://www.ios-wildlifetrust.org.uk/appeals/protect-our-plovers): www.ios-wildlifetrust.org.uk/appeals/protect-our-plovers

Julian Branscombe

Invasive Plants

The Isles of Scilly are famous for their beautiful sandy beaches and mild climate and for their beautiful flowers. Many of the plants that people probably associate with the islands, the winter-flowering narcissus and the exotic looking Echiums and Agapanthus are not native to Scilly. Many are the descendants of introduced garden or commercial species that have now become established.

Sadly this is where a problem arises. Some of these garden escapees have got out of hand. Often this is accidental, but sometimes people have planted or thrown out garden plants and these became established. There are places where the impact on native wild flowers or valuable habitats is becoming damaging.



New Zealand flax

Plants such as Sour Fig for example, originally introduced to stabilise the dunes and stop the annoying sand blows, can grow into large dense mats and completely suppress the wild plants. New Zealand Flax is spreading all along the north of St Martin's and seems almost unstoppable. Other shrubs, including Pittosporum and Coprosma are excellent hedges and windbreaks. Thrushes and blackbirds feed on the fruits and have spread the plants into the nature reserves and like Sour Fig have now invaded many uninhabited islands.

So now Small is Beautiful is undertaking a study of some of these invasive species, where they are, how many and what affect they are having. This will involve the Wildlife Trust who are responsible for the SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) as well as many farmers.

Of course, there is no plan to carry out wholesale removal of the plants, even those that have been identified as being problematic. Your gardens are quite safe, Tresco Abbey Gardens are safe. Any eradication will have to be done judiciously, in specific places and over a long timescale. But for the sake of the unique, very special flora of the Isles of Scilly some intervention is necessary.

*Everyone can help by making sure garden waste is composted or disposed of safely.
And perhaps discouraging the deliberate spreading of cuttings of garden plants
in the countryside or around the coast.*

There will be follow up farm walks and sessions when all this can be discussed and people who wish to can be involved.

Rosemary Parslow

Case Study: Churchtown Farm, St Martin's

Many people will have heard of or even visited Churchtown Farm when they have been holidaying on the Isles of Scilly. Few summer visitors can resist the invitation to pop in to see the pinks and other flowers being packed to be sent away by post. Like many families, I get a box of their scented narcissus sent to me by my daughter at Christmas.



Weasel Snout

To botanists and lovers of wild flowers, Churchtown Farm is also well known. It is the only place in UK where St Martin's Buttercup is to be found. Although not native, this little flower which is found in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East somehow got to Scilly and found the fields around Pound Lane to its liking. Now a few plants are still to be found on Churchtown Farm where the Julians' keep a watching brief!



The St Martin's Buttercup

When the Small is Beautiful team visited the farm they were able to see not only the little buttercup in flower, but also the impressive range of rare and threatened wild plants, the arable 'weeds' that were growing on what is a successful, busy, and commercial farm. Ian and David found many of the plants especially associated with bulb fields on the farm. These included some they were expecting, for example Small-flowered Catchfly, Corn Spurrey, Corn Marigold and Hairy Birdsfoot Trefoil and some which are not found as frequently, such as Weasel Snout and Bur Chervil.

Since growing winter-flowering narcissus is no longer the main farming enterprise on the islands, it was feared the unique communities of plants that were associated with bulb-growing might be lost altogether. Encouraged by what has been shown at Churchtown and other farms, it is felt it will be possible for most to keep a headland or strip of cultivated ground on their farm where these special wild arable plants can survive. And this does not mean just any piece of waste ground, but as most of these plants are arable species they need cultivation annually to give them the disturbance they need to germinate.

Rosemary Parslow



Ian and Dave carrying out surveys

Surveying Arable Plants

Surveys carried out in April and May that looked at the bulb fields, cultivated areas (including around gardens or vegetable patches) and disturbed areas on farms, have now been completed.

The survey aim was to search and record the presence of Nationally Rare (NR), Nationally Scarce (NS) and threatened (according to IUCN criteria) arable plants in Great Britain that occur as 'bulb-field weeds' on Scilly. The most threatened species have been assessed as Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN) or Vulnerable (VU). Species that are close to being threatened are classed as Near Threatened (NT).

Due to the history of bulb-growing, mild climate and light sandy acidic soils, the suite of arable plants found on Scilly is unique to the British Isles. Nowhere else has such a concentration of rare and threatened arable plants in one small area. The margins of bulb fields were found to be the best places to find the target species especially along tractor tracks, headlands and where ground was left fallow for a year or two.

Endemic to Scilly and Cornwall is the beautiful and large-flowered Western Ramping-fumitory (NS), and this was found in a few places, not only in the fields but often sprawling into the hedges. Weasel's-snout was found in only three places, one on St Martin's and two places on St Mary's. Corn Marigold (VU) and Corn Spurrey (VU) are much more widespread, and both can be found in abundance in some fields, but Nettle-leaved Goosefoot (VU) was found only on Bryher.



Ian, Jaclyn and Johann Hicks on site at Tamarisk Farm

Each island is different - St Mary's has the most species of interest, followed by St Martin's, Bryher, St Agnes and Tresco. Small-flowered Catchfly (EN) was one of the main species found and was in the majority of active bulb fields, sometimes in abundance. This often grows with Lesser Quaking-grass (NS) which was also widespread.



Corn Marigold



Western ramping-fumitory



Lesser quaking grass



Small-flowered catchfly

Field Woundwort (NT) was surprisingly not very widespread but perhaps appears more later in the year. Both the more common Subterranean Clover and Hairy Bird's-foot-trefoil (NS) sometimes form large mats of plants in the grassier parts of the field especially along the south-facing margins, the latter found throughout the fields in places.

A most exciting find was a second site for Grass-poly (EN), growing in a damp tractor rut in a field on St Mary's, well away from the original site. Another species that is in serious decline is Shepherd's Needle (CR). Found on St Martin's in the past this was not seen there during this survey but some were found on St Agnes. It is probable that plants had come in with a seed mix. Many other rare, scarce or threatened species were seen and lists for each farm will be made available in future weeks.

Ian Bennallick

Surveying Arable Plants - What happens next?

Ian will be producing a report and information on the species found on individual farms.

Then, next season, Liz Askins and Dave Mawer will be following up with farm visits and workshops to help with identifying some of the key species found on individual holdings. This will demonstrate to farmers the importance of what they are doing already and possible plans to do more to accommodate rare plants into their management.

Hopefully, many farmers have now seen how important their management is, it is what they do that has such a tremendous influence on the survival of these special Scillonian plants!

Woodland Condition Assessments

George Shortman, is the Duchy's Woodland Creation Officer, based in Restormel, Lostwithiel. George will be conducting woodland condition assessments in mid-July as part of the Small is Beautiful project.

George explains the purpose of his visit:

"I'm visiting the Isles of Scilly for five days to assess the condition of the woods. The data collected will include tree health, open space, species diversity, age distribution and lots more. This data will complement that of the other surveyors and help us to understand the mosaic of land cover types. This data will be used to inform future operations aimed at improving the condition and functionality of the woods."



George Shortman

Stay in touch

If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of the topics in this newsletter, please get in touch:

Jaclyn Pearson - Programme Manager

email: jpearson@smallisbeautiful.org.uk

tel: 07386 675167

David Mawer - Project Officer

email: dmawer@smallisbeautiful.org.uk

tel: 07386 675166