

**Met Office**

## **Biodiversity at the Met Office**

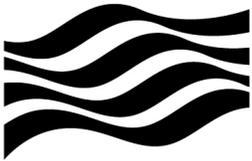
**Neal Pearce – Environmental Advisor**

The Met Office operates in an environmentally responsible manner. We effectively manage our negative impacts while also trying to promote the positive impacts we may be having upon the environment around us. To assist on this, we have a certificated environmental management system aligned to the ISO 14001 standard. Biodiversity plays a significant part of our environmental management system and we have integrated this in our processes. This is for a number of reasons both legal, moral and ethical. We are trying to reduce any negative impacts and also through the development of sites, such as here at Exeter, to enhance the biodiversity performance. The biodiversity itself aligns to the standards as dictated by the Wildlife Trusts. This involves both commitment, planning, implementation and monitoring of biodiversity performance. This has been implemented to such an extent that the Wildlife Trusts have actually awarded the site the biodiversity benchmark. There are only 15 organisations and 40 sites throughout the entire UK that have this achievement. Next up, Adam Scaife will be describing to you the activities being undertaken on site. He is the chair of the Exeter based biodiversity group, a team of dedicated volunteers who are committed to enhancing the biodiversity performance on these grounds.

### **Adam Scaife – Chair of the Biodiversity working group**

Here we are on the top meadow, this was the first part of land that we introduced an alternative management regime for. This occurred after negotiating with the people who manage the land around the Met Office site and a few staff volunteers, myself included, have suggested an alternative management regime where we only cut the grass and remove all the thatch once a year and this gives a chance for wildflowers to grow, flower and drop seed into the meadow and that creates a knock on effect on all sorts of things. We've had many more species of invertebrates, such as butterflies and bugs, than there used to be here. And you might be thinking that this all sounds a bit like tree hugging but it's not, bear in mind that 97% of wildflower meadows have been lost in the UK in the last few decades and that has an enormous detrimental effect on all sorts of things, not just butterflies but right up to birds and higher animals that depend on that. So it's not just a green thing. You might not care about bugs and things but bear in mind that one in three mouthfuls of all the food you eat is pollinated by an insect so this kind of activity, although it's on a small scale here is really important and we feel that the Met Office is kind of taking a good lead as a government organisation in introducing this kind of management regime on the land we have around the main building.

We're no longer applying any fertiliser on the site and the reason for that is that it was running off in the rain water and entering the pond water behind me and increasing the nitrate content in the water which was leading to large growths of algae. So by reducing the amount of fertiliser to zero in fact, there are no fertilisers applied on the site and that's helping to improve the water quality. The other thing we've done recently is to put in more water lilies, as you can see behind me, and those help to shield out the sunlight and again reduce the growth of algae in the water. So the water quality is increasing and we now have established colonies of various amphibians



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in the pond and another final thing that we're doing is trying to improve the margins of the pond by introducing a different mowing regime. So we're mowing less frequently in the two metres around the border of the pond and that's leading to an increase number of damp meadow wild plants growing on site, such as the very rare Maiden Pink which we've recently found.

So we're now managing lots of small areas like this around the Met Office site for conservation and biodiversity. But we're just staff volunteers, we're not experts and so we've also involved various wildlife trusts to get advice from them on what to do next and one of the things we want to do is to increase the number of native plants in the flower beds, the more formal areas close to the buildings, so that'll be done during the year. And the other thing that we're doing is maintaining the formal mowing regime around the edges of all these areas as you can see behind me the paths are tightly mown around the edge and that allows you to introduce this biodiversity and these conservation measures and have this kind of riot of wild flowers next to the more formally mown areas and so you can actually keep the place looking really neat and tidy while also increasing biodiversity.