

A Matter of Death and Life in St Paul's Churchyard

By Maggie Morland

Look closely -this quiet sanctuary for the dead is also thriving with life. St Paul's churchyard is a haven for many species of plants and animals that go mostly un-noticed and undisturbed. But pause for a while, listen to the robin singing from the holly, the delicate leaves of lofty lime trees rustling in the breeze or insects buzzing among the wildflowers and ivy. Look for the tiny snapdragon flowers of ivy-leaved toadflax clambering over the stone walls or stroke the rough lichens and velvety mosses encrusting the weathered gravestones. In spring a heavenly scent drifts up from a haze of bluebells on the woodland edge, while in autumn the fungi release their own musty perfume.



Ivy-leaved Toadflax on a wall



Ivy flowers are a vital source of nectar in autumn

At dusk you may even see or hear a nocturnal visitor, pipistrelle bats flitting around the roof tiles, a grunting badger, snuffling hedgehog or the haunting call of a tawny owl.

Trees create atmosphere in the churchyard, and provide shelter, nesting sites for birds and shade. St Paul's churchyard trees include lime, oak, holly, privet, pine and yew. Yews are only native in Britain on chalk and limestone, so most have been planted deliberately. Traditionally a symbol of immortality, resurrection and protection from evil, yews were commonly planted by the lych-gate, priests meeting the coffins by the yew tree. The yew avenue from the lych-gate to the West door at St Paul's protects visitors both literally and symbolically.



One of the many lichens on gravestones



The yew avenue leading to the lych-gate

The churchyard around St Paul's is a 'closed' churchyard, now managed by Charnwood Borough Council while the land across the road is still managed by the Church. Wildlife is valued and encouraged so weedkiller is only used on the paths and the fabric of the building itself, while careful mowing avoids damaging wildflowers, many species of which can be found in the wilder corners and edges. Twenty-four different species of lichen were found here by the County Recorder for lichens, Ivan Pedley.



Pine needles



Green alkanet under the trees

In their recent project to investigate the wildlife of Leicestershire's churchyards, Steve Woodward and Helen Iken from the Loughborough Naturalists Club visited St Paul's churchyard to discover more about the biodiversity of this peaceful corner of the village. John Daws also surveyed the spiders to be found there. Their results include the following:

Spiders (Many have no common English name)

Tegenaria duellica	Spider
Lathys humilis	“
Paidiscura pallens	“
Metellina mengei	“
Tenuiphantes tenuis	“
Nerienne peltata	“
Erigone atra	“
Clubiona terrestris	“
Xysticus cristatus	“
Pisaura mirabilis	Nursery Web Spider
Alopecosa pulverulenta	Spider
Pardosa pullata	“
Clubiona corticalis	“
Textrix denticulata	“
Tibellus oblongus	“
Dysdera crocata	Woodlouse Spider
	Comb-footed Cellar
Nesticus cellulanus	Spider
Harpactea hombergi	Spider
Araneus diadematus	Garden Spider
Walckenaeria acuminata	Spider

Palliduphantes ericaeus	“
Keijia tincta	“
Stemonyphantes lineatus	“
Steatoda bipunctata	“
Dismodicus bifrons	“

Flowering Plants

Carex caryophyllea	Spring-sedge
Saxifraga granulata	Meadow Saxifrage
Anthoxanthum odoratum	Sweet Vernal-grass
Bellis perennis	Daisy
Cirsium vulgare	Spear Thistle
Conopodium majus	Pignut
Conopodium majus	Pignut
Dryopteris filix-mas	Male-fern
Fagus sylvatica	Beech
Geranium robertianum	Herb-Robert
Hyacinthoides non-scripta	Bluebell
Phyllitis scolopendrium	Hart's-tongue
Pilosella officinarum	Mouse-ear-hawkweed
Plantago major	Greater Plantain
Poa trivialis	Rough Meadow-grass
Ranunculus acris	Meadow Buttercup
Ranunculus repens	Creeping Buttercup
Rumex acetosa	Common Sorrel
Rumex obtusifolius	Broad-leaved Dock
Taraxacum sect. Ruderalia	Plant
Tortula muralis	Wall Screw-moss
Veronica chamaedrys	Germander Speedwell
Veronica officinalis	Heath Speedwell

Other invertebrates

Androniscus dentiger	Rosy Woodlouse
	Common Shiny
Oniscus asellus	Woodlouse
	Common Striped
Philoscia muscorum	Woodlouse
	Common Rough
Porcellio scaber	Woodlouse
	Common Pygmy
Trichoniscus pusillus	Woodlouse
Tyria jacobaeae	Cinnabar Moth
Aphidecta oblitterata	Larch Ladybird
Chilocorus renipustulatus	Kidney-spot Ladybird

(many thanks to John, Steve Woodward and Helen Iken (Loughborough Naturalists Club) and also Sue Timms Principal Ecologist at Leicestershire County Council for this information.) This is by no means an exhaustive list and many more species are present in the churchyard waiting to be discovered! If you spot anything in St Paul's churchyard (or anywhere in the Parish) do record your findings, together with the date,

your name, the exact location and a photograph if possible to Naturespot (www.naturespot.org.uk) the Leicestershire wildlife recording website. Even if you don't know exactly what you have found, it will be identified for you and the record sent to local and national recording schemes. Help record and save wildlife in our villages and countryside.



Snowdrops in the churchyard