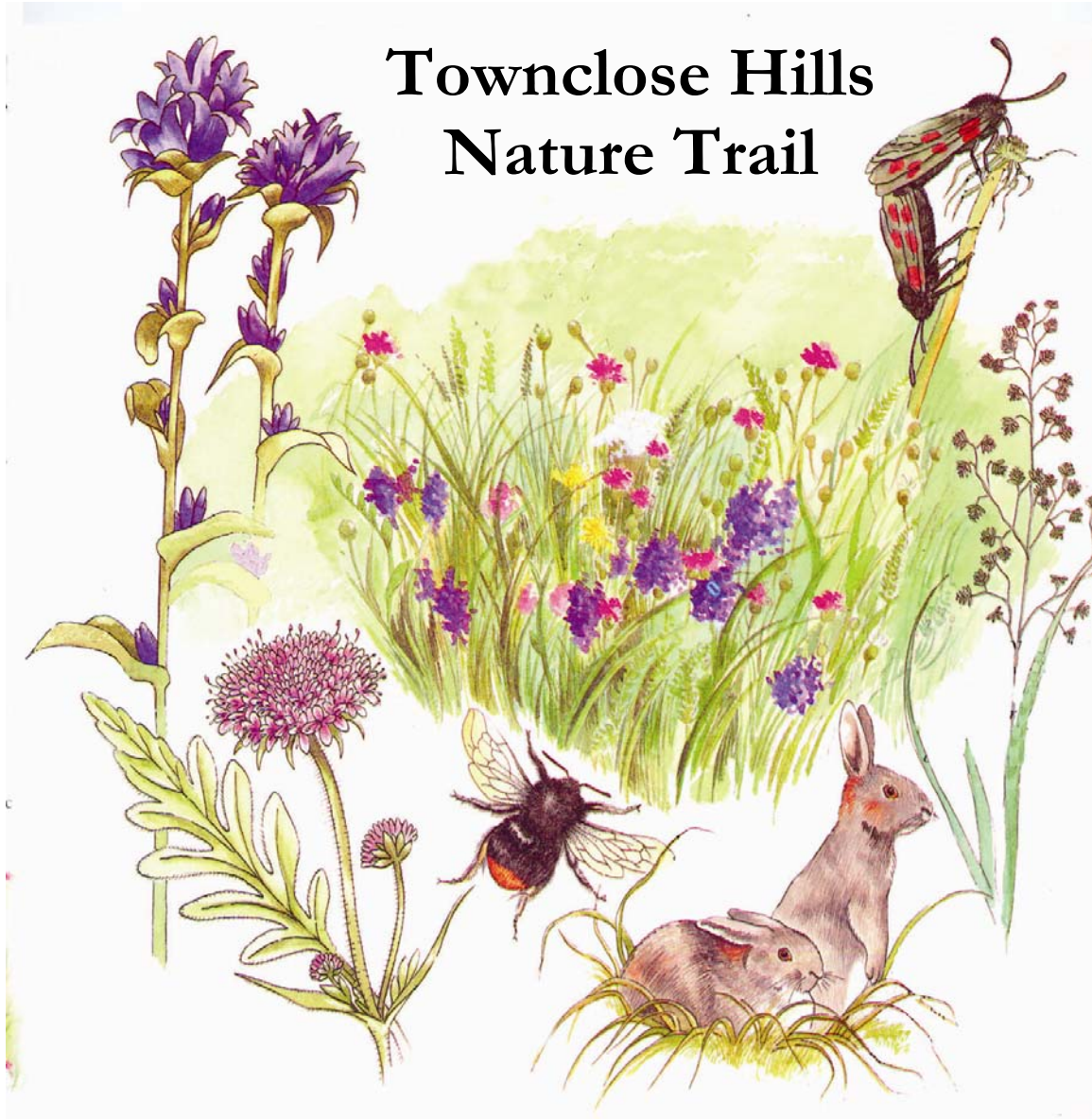


# Townclose Hills Nature Trail



## 1. Meadow

The meadows surrounding Townclose Hills burst into flower in early summer. Throughout the following months the meadows are filled with ox-eye daisies, white clover and the vibrant pink knapweed. These wild flowers are a source of nectar and pollen for butterflies, bees and other insects, while the fine grasses that grow here are ideal food for caterpillars.

The meadows are cut each year once the flowers have set seed, and the hay is then removed. Meadows have traditionally been managed in this way for hundreds of years, and this has brought about the great variety of species that today are specially adapted to meadow life.

## 2. Woodland

This woodland – known locally as ‘Billy Wood’ – has regenerated naturally on what was once the site of a limestone quarry. Ash, wych elm and sycamore dominate the canopy, while the shrub layer (or understorey) is made up of hazel and hawthorn. Its rich ground flora is typical of old woodlands, and is best viewed in springtime: the distinctive toothed leaves of dog’s mercury emerge as early as February, followed by sweet-smelling violets and the white star-shaped flowers of wood anemone in March. A carpet of native bluebells and wild garlic can be seen (and smelt!) from April-June.

Some trees in the woodland have been coppiced in the past – these are the ones with lots of stems growing from a single stump. The stems can be

harvested every 8-10 years and more shoots then regrow from the stumps. Coppicing continues today as part of our habitat management for the site – it layers the woodland structure so that it can support a high diversity of species including birds, small mammals, insects, and woodland plants. Old coppice stumps, or ‘stools’, are excellent habitats for fungi and minibeasts associated with dead wood.

### **3. Magnesian limestone grassland**

This grassland is a rare type of chalk grassland only found along a narrow band of magnesian limestone that stretches from Nottingham up to the River Tyne. It has not been subjected to the grazing or intensive spraying of herbicides that has reduced grassland biodiversity in other areas, and as a result it supports a wide variety of plant and animal species, many of which are restricted to the limestone grassland habitat. The grassland flowers from March onwards, the bright yellows of the early cowslips giving way to the bright pinks and purples of clustered bellflower, harebell, field scabious and greater knapweed in the summer.

The magnesian limestone grassland is the most important habitat here at Townclose and much of the site management is aimed at preserving and enhancing it. The plateau is mown each year after the flowering season, and the hay is removed. This prevents it becoming overgrown with brambles or dominated by just one or two competitive grass species.

### **4. Scrub**

Scrubby areas provide singing posts, food, hiding places and nesting spots for many different bird species, and together with the woodlands and open grasslands found within Townclose Hills, support several nationally important species. These include the skylark, linnet and yellowhammer. Summer visitors such as willow warblers, whitethroats and turtle doves nest amongst the scrub, while winter migrants like redwings and fieldfares will harvest the berries in the colder months.

Much of the grassland at Townclose Hills would eventually be lost if the scrub – here made up of hawthorn, blackthorn, dogwood and bramble – were left unmanaged. Different patches of scrub are cut each year, so there is always some element of well-established scrub cover for the birds and other animals that need it.

### **5. Stream and woodland glade**

Woodland glades provide open space that is essential for many species, and make a great contribution to woodland biodiversity. Such areas provide flowers and berries for invertebrates, birds and mammals to feed on, and vegetation ranging from short grass to trees, which can be used by many different species. Kippax Beck runs alongside this part of the site.

Regular management helps to maintain the open feel of the glade and to ensure that the diversity of life that is found here can be sustained. This management involves annual strimming, removal of alien species (such as Himalayan balsam) and scrub clearance where necessary.