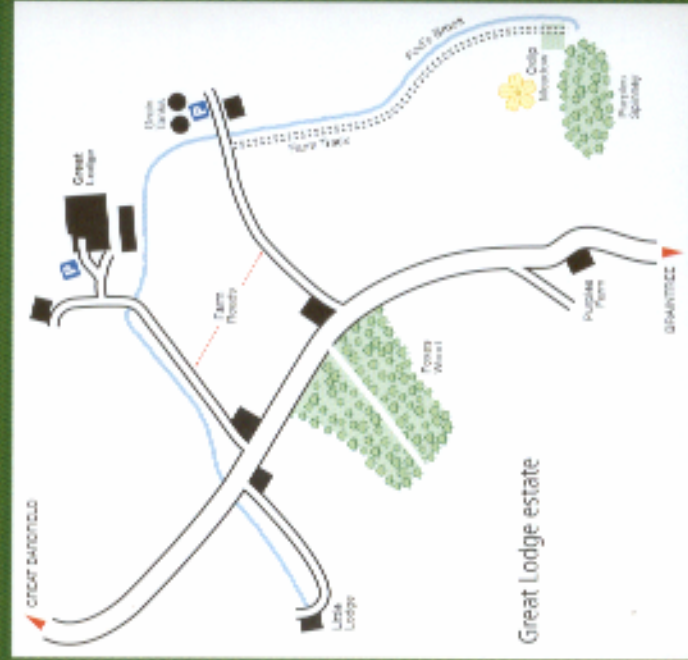


How to find the Oxlip meadows



Great Bardfield village



Great Lodge estate

Visiting and Volunteering

Piper's Meadow, named after a former Town Crier, is open at all times and is managed by the Parish Council. Take care at the edge of the river.

The Ash Ground at Bardfield Great Lodge and the farm walk to it are also open at all times. You are advised to get a leaflet to the walk, which is obtainable at the interpretation board in the farm yard.

Remember that it is a working farm: keep to the paths indicated and wear stout footwear. Take care on all sites if children are with you. Please keep dogs on a lead.

Oxlips are only in flower during April although other wildlife can be seen at all times of year.

If you are interested in working as a volunteer with the Essex Wildlife Trust, telephone 01621 862960 or go to www.essexwt.org.uk

Acknowledgments

The success of this project results from a partnership between several groups to whom many thanks are due: The Local Heritage Initiative; Essex Biodiversity Project; Nationwide Building Society; Great Bardfield Parish Council; Essex Wildlife Trust; Braintree District Council; The Great Lodge Estate; and most of all, those parishioners of Great Bardfield who have given their time and effort to make it all work.



The Return of the Bardfield Oxlips

A community conservation project to re-introduce Oxlips to Great Bardfield



"... Oxlips grow by thousands in the meadows... in one instance... being a very mass of yellow bloom."

Henry Doubleday 1842

Status

Every spring for thousands of years a number of ancient meadows and woodlands in Eastern England have been graced by the spectacular mass flowering of the Oxlip, *Primula elatior*. This is a sight all too rarely seen these days, as the Oxlip has declined due to changes in land management, habitat loss and over-grazing by deer.

A survey by the Essex Wildlife Trust in 2002 suggested that on many sites numbers had declined by 90 per cent. Great Bardfield has one of only two Oxlip meadows remaining in Essex, although the survey revealed only a handful of plants remained.

The Oxlip is one of five native primulas, of which the Primrose and Cowslip are better known. It is a nationally scarce plant, and it only grows in the area where Essex, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire meet. In Essex it is confined to the heavy boulder clay soils in the North West of the county and to stream-side meadows.



History

It was the great Essex botanist from Braintree, John Ray, who in 1660 first identified the true Oxlip in England, in woodland in Cambridgeshire. However, these primulas do interbreed and produce hybrids. The most common of these is the Cowslip-Primrose hybrid, now known as the 'false, or common Oxlip'.

In the 19th century there was much debate as to whether the Oxlip was a true species, or simply a hybrid. Henry Doubleday, a keen naturalist from Epping, visited Great Bardfield regularly, and was quite sure the plant he saw in the meadows there was the true species.

In a letter dated 1842, Doubleday said of the plants that:

"They cannot be hybrids, for the Primrose does not exist in this parish, and these Oxlips grow by thousands in the meadows... in one instance... being a very mass of yellow bloom".



Finally in 1869 Charles Darwin published a paper, having carried out a number of cross pollination experiments on seeds from Great Bardfield, in which he concluded "... it is manifest that *P. elatior* is not a hybrid, and that it differs fundamentally from the common Oxlip". That ended the debate.

From that time the plant was commonly known for many years as the 'Bardfield Oxlip'. A carving of the plant appears on the Town Hall.

Oxlip recovery project

Together Essex Wildlife Trust, the Parish Council and Mr Alan Jordan, owner of Bardfield Great Lodge mutually agreed to set up a project to re-establish the plant in the Parish of Great Bardfield, as its disappearance would represent a sad loss for conservation.

Two sites were agreed for the re-introduction of the species. One is Piper's Meadow in the heart of Bardfield village, and by the bridge where Doubleday described the plant; the second is the Ash Ground, a meadow on the Great Lodge estate. The two meadows were chosen since they are the rarer habitat for the plant, they will need less management than a wood, and they are the habitat almost lost at Bardfield.

The basis of the project was to collect seed from plants within the parish from which plants were germinated at Writtle college. After 12 or 18 months the young plants were planted out into the



"The English Society of Friends" in Essex



meadows in groups as they would be naturally and the grass is managed to allow the plants sufficient light. This is done with a power mower, and the cuttings are removed.

All of this work is undertaken or contracted by the people of Great Bardfield with the help of the Parish Council – this is a project truly owned and guided by local people now they have been trained by Essex Wildlife Trust staff. In addition, a series of sessions were run by Trust education staff for the children in the village school. These sessions include planting of Oxlips, and recording plants and insects in the meadow.

You will notice that part of the meadow at the Ash Ground has been fenced. This is to prevent deer from eating too many of the Oxlips.

