



Ladybirds and Schools Grounds

Ladybirds in Scotland like several different habitats, and the best way you can make your schools grounds as friendly as possible to as many different species, is to create as many of the different types as you can. Fortunately, it isn't difficult and you don't need to make much of each habitat to make it attractive to ladybirds in the area.

Have a look at your school grounds – even better, get the kids to make a map with all the different habitats present. You can use the suggestions from the Ladybird Recording sheet (Park, Garden, Woodland, Moorland, Grassland etc) if it's easier. You can then use the map to identify habitats that you haven't got, and areas that you might be able to create them in.

Don't forget about hibernating ladybirds. Many of them use the same areas as they do in the summer, but they find sheltered spots such as in leaf litter or under grass tussocks. It's important not to be too tidy, in case you accidentally move ladybirds out of your school grounds. You can also build a few Hibernation Hotels, using the guide on the CD. These should be placed in sheltered, cool spots and provide ideal habitats for ladybirds, and also hibernating bees and butterflies.

Grasslands and wildflower meadows

Many species like grasslands and wildflower meadows, from the tussocky wild areas with nettles, docks and knapweed, through to meadows sown with wildflower seed mixes. You can attract many different species by leaving some corners of the playing field to go wild, or planting a small wildflower meadow.

If you plant a wildflower meadow, do bear in mind that they need looking after. The need to be mown once a year (usually around September) and have the cutting removed, so that there is space for the new seeds to grow. If this doesn't happen, the species diversity will decrease and after a few years, will only be full of the hardy plants that out compete the other, such as nettles and brambles.

The area left to go wild will grow with whatever seeds are already in the soil, and generally don't need much looking after. The advantages of this, is that the habitat is also favoured by hibernating ladybirds, so you don't want to cut and remove the dead flowers.

Deciduous trees and hedges

Several species in Scotland have strong association with deciduous trees and hedgerows. Favourite species are Oak, Ash, Lime and Sycamore. All these species can grow very big, so you don't need to plant many to provide good habitat. They can also be complemented by smaller species such as Rowan, Cherry and Birch which also provide great habitat for birds and other insects. If you are able, planting a hedgerow in the grounds is another fantastic way to provide habitat for a range of species, not just ladybirds. Using a mix of 5 different species in your hedge, such as Hawthorn, Elder, Dog Rose, Blackthorn, Holly and/or Hazel is recommended.

Many of the Scottish species of ladybirds also hibernate in leaf litter from both deciduous and conifer trees, so avoiding sweeping up all the leaves in autumn is another good way to provide for your ladybirds. You don't have to leave everything, a few patches under the trees should be enough.

Conifer trees

Like their names suggest, the Pine and Larch ladybirds depend on conifer trees, particularly Larch and Scots Pine. As with the deciduous trees above, you don't need to plant many to make a good habitat, but do try to plant them together rather than spread out over the school. Larch and Pine don't grow as big as the deciduous species above, but they do grow quite quickly.

The cool and damp provided by conifer trees in winter makes an ideal hibernation spot for more species than just the Pine and Larch ladybirds. The cracks in the bark and the needles on the floor provides shelter for the Orange, Striped and Eyed ladybirds.

Heather

If you are in an area that has records of the Hieroglyphic ladybird, it might be worth trying to create a small heather heathland, as it is thought that this ladybird is decreasing in population due to loss of habitat. It is entirely dependent on heather, eating the larvae of the heather leaf beetle and hibernating in plant litter under heather plants. They use all species of heather, so you could create a rockery of different heather plants, planting them close together, so they will grow into quite dense bushes and give shelter and protection to any Hieroglyphic ladybirds that come across your heathland.