23rd July 2025 Visit to Rob Lee – Wild Flower Seeds Nursery

Rob Lee is a fascinating individual, passionate about nature conservation and his nursery's role in the reestablishment of wildflower meadows in the UK. From a background in large scale native tree production, his 'seed story' actually began with the supply of tree seeds to the UK woodland and nursery stock industry. Then, 20 years ago, through his involvement in a number of projects creating wildflower rich meadows in Shropshire, he decided to switch to wildflower seed collection, for single species production. He has never looked back.

Middle Marches Community Land Trust were lucky enough to spend a morning with Rob and his equally passionate team at their site near Battlefield in Shrewsbury. A corner of land sandwiched between 2 main roads but completely out of sight, it is here on Rob's small farm of 15 acres, that 50 wildflower species are grown and harvested to create a variety of seed mixes suitable for different habitats and conditions, including perhaps surprisingly, ponds and wetland.

Our tour began with Rob showing us some of the plants he produces in trays of up to 200 modules. Often a seed is so tricky to get to germinate, never mind reach the stage of being a decent sized healthy plant, that customers will ask Rob to grow these plants on their behalf. Such an example is Brooklime - latin name, the rather marvellous 'Veronica beccabunga,' which produces 55000 seeds per gram or 55 million per kg and is, as might be expected, extraordinarily difficult to sow with any degree of precision, let alone success!

Equally, in some cases, there may be a higher success rate if propagation is carried out by taking cuttings - an example of this is the marsh violet, food for the increasingly rare small pearl border fritillary butterfly. This has caused so much concern within the Shropshire hills area, where the butterfly has traditionally had a stronghold, that last year, the National Trust planted 20,000 plants in an effort to halt the rapid decline. Rob is currently growing marsh violets to populate Norbury Hill, one of the Trust's very own sites, where there is also a dwindling population of these beautiful butterflies.

Following on, Rob talked about the process of refining a single seed species. Giving the example of yellow rattle, he explained that after being harvested using a special brush cutting machine, the seeds then need to go through roughly 4 hours of processing in order to refine them into a pure mix that can be sold as such. For this purpose, he has designed and built bespoke machinery and the 'engine room' of the business has shelves stacked with sieves of staggeringly precise measurements, each corresponding to the seed of a specific flower.

To conclude our tour, we were taken out into the meadows themselves, where single species are cultivated in wide strips. There was devil's bit scabious, betony, purple loosestrife, pink and white yarrow and bright yellow fleabane which was swarming with busy honey bees, all wearing fat panniers of deep orange pollen. Standing guard over this treasure were a pair of kites - not the birds but actual kites in the shape of birds of prey, there to terrorise any flocks of marauding gold finches that might decide to descend and strip the crops of seed.

Rob explained that vitally, the nursery's seed harvesting was not restricted to his own small farm but that there were 'crucial donor sites' throughout the midlands where he was allowed to harvest seed. Not only does this mean he can offer a wider range of species from a greater genetic pool, but also that he has the benefit of many more acres than he could possibly manage himself. It is testament to the high esteem he is held in, within the sector, that he has developed this relationship with other owners and also to the growing enthusiasm of farmers and smallholders, to return to the old ways, where a species rich wildflower meadow, with all its wonderful associated insect and animal life was the norm.

For more information visit https://www.robleewildflowerseeds.co.uk/



