

# MEADOWS NEWS

## Conserving and Restoring Wildflower-rich Grasslands in Monmouthshire

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*Fritillaria meleagris*/C Adamson



*Narcissus obvallaris*, Tenby daffodil/C Adamson

## Welcome

Welcome to the MMG Spring Newsletter!

Following the near-drought conditions of summer 2025, the latter part of the year, by contrast, saw almost continual rain - Wales had its 10th wettest autumn on record. Storm Claudia brought heavy rainfall in November causing devastating flooding in Monmouth and the village of Skenfrith. Rain predominated throughout the winter: South Wales experienced 173.7mm of rainfall in February, 166% above the long term average, saturating the ground. Sunshine was, not surprisingly, below average yet overall the winter was mild.

So what does this mean for our meadows? Anecdotally, spring bulbs such as narcissus pseudonarcissus (the wild daffodil or Lent Lily) bloomed early and in profusion. Of most concern are the insects and pollinators - those overwintering underground may have suffered most, and damp dull conditions limit flying and feeding; I saw my first Queen bumble on 24th February - I hope to see many more.

## From our Chair



Welcome to our Spring Newsletter! 2026 sees the start of the new Sustainable Farming Scheme in Wales. The reserves management committee, supported by Andy Karran of Gwent Wildlife Trust, will be reviewing the management plans for our three reserves to ensure that they are consistent with the criteria of the new SFS, and that they support the wide variety of invertebrate life revealed by our invertebrate surveys - summarised by our President on page 6. One challenge will be to ensure that we can increase tree cover on our reserves while maintaining our beautiful meadows. We hope that by restoring, replanting and protecting our hedgerows we will be able to meet the requirements of the SFS and support wildlife.

### Committee changes

This year has seen a number of changes in the committee. Judith Carruthers and Rachel Duncan, our former Chair, have both departed from the committee. We wish them both well in their new ventures as they move away from Monmouthshire.

It is with great sadness that we are bidding farewell to Marilyn Dunkelman, our Membership Secretary and to David Llewellyn, our Treasurer.

David first joined the committee in 2017, and was one of the key players in moving from a small charitable organisation to a CIO, with the right to own land assets. In addition to the Treasurer role, David has played a very active part in management of our reserves, including leading and participating in work parties. He is also the 'Tracmaster Minder' - MMGs motorised allen-scythe, used for mowing members' small fields - a role he will continue to fulfil.

Marilyn is well-known to our members, having served on the committee since 2013. She has been the friendly face of MMG, welcoming all new members into the group and ensuring that all queries to MMG are answered. Marilyn has juggled so many jobs: the membership database, the website, the newsletter, grant funding applications, as well as organising all of our events. With her organisational and IT skills, and her own projector, she has ensured the smooth running of our members' meetings. She has also been very busy behind the scenes editing and coordinating the publication of all three editions of '*Grassland Fungi: A Field Guide*' which has been extremely successful. All revenue from the sales has come back to the Meadows Group. We thank Marilyn for her dedication and hope to continue to see her at our MMG events.

We are pleased to have appointed a new trustee, whose appointment will be formally ratified at our Spring AGM on 16th April.

### Events

Our **AGM and Spring Meeting** will be held on the evening of **Thursday 16th April**, in Llanishen Village Hall. We have three invited speakers and the talks will be followed by a supper, giving members an opportunity to socialise. Further details on page 3; please visit our website to book your ticket.

This year, MMGs **Open Meadows Day** will be on **Saturday 6th June** at some meadows at Newchurch and at Earlswood. Further details will be published on the MMG website nearer the time.

On **Saturday 13th June**, we will be supporting our local charity, Bees for Development at the **Monmouth Bee Festival**. Held in the Nelson Garden, it's an afternoon of interesting and delightful bee-themed activities.

*Sally Jones*

## MMG Spring Meeting

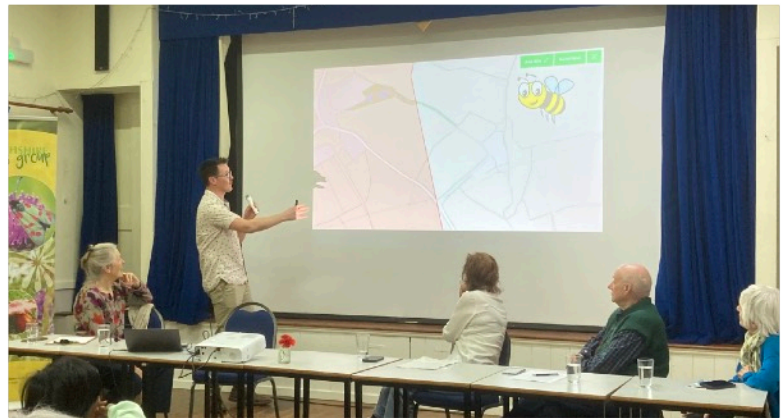
We hope that you will be able to join us for our **AGM and Spring Meeting** on Thursday 16 April in Llanishen. Our brief AGM will be held at 6.30pm followed by three short talks focused on nature recovery. You will learn how the wildlife clusters we are developing can support resilient ecological networks (RENs) throughout Monmouthshire:

- *Kate Stinchcombe*, Nature Recovery manager for Monmouthshire council will be highlighting the environmental benefits;
- *Richard Thomas* of Natural Resources Wales will provide an overview of mapping;
- *Elliot Waters* of the Gwent Green Grid Partnership will discuss how MMG members can contribute.

All members and supporters are welcome. The talks and discussion will be followed, at approximately 8pm, by a delicious home-made meal with wine. There is no charge for the meeting (although donations are appreciated), but you will need to book your place. The cost of the two-course meal (including a glass of wine or local apple juice) is £18. Please let us know that you are coming by visiting our [website](#) or clicking [here](#). Llanishen Village Hall, Church Road, Llanishen NP16 6QE

///appear.fuses.younger

## Wildlife Corridors in the Community: MMG Autumn Meeting 2025



Our autumn meeting in November, held at Gwehelog Village Hall, was very well attended. The theme of the afternoon was connectivity - that is how we can link up areas to create wildlife corridors and allow nature to thrive.

Our guest speakers were Dr Stephanie Tyler and three MMG members: Steph introduced the theme of the meeting and then local members Simon Taylor, Steve Hoselitz and Saran Allot-Davey talked about the delights of their own meadows and pastures, all in the Gwehelog and Trostrey area. Linking these areas was an aim. The talks inspired members from other areas in Monmouthshire to get together with neighbouring meadow owners to see how they could connect up.



'Thank you' to our wonderful volunteer cake makers!

## Volunteers

MMG thrives due to the commitment of its trustees and volunteers, so thank you to everyone who makes it all happen.

Our open days give access to wonderful private meadows, we look after some incredible meadows and our botanists guide members on how to improve their patch, big or small, for plants and wildlife. It's hugely rewarding to be part of a movement that absolutely makes a difference in creating space for nature.

We have had a great response to our request for volunteers. If you would like to be added to our volunteers' WhatsApp Group, please let us know what help you can give - no commitment at all but it will give you the opportunity to pitch in and help when it suits you.

At present, we need some specific offers for help in these areas please: Bookkeeping ; IT/ Admin e.g. helping with website/bookkeeping; Mapping; Reserves work parties. But there are also other areas where we welcome help too: a couple of hours helping at an event; helping our botanists during surveys; checking our own meadows; or even making a cake!

To be added as a volunteer please email:

[monmeadowsgroupchair@gmail.com](mailto:monmeadowsgroupchair@gmail.com)



Clearing wood at Ida's Meadow

## News from our reserves

**Kingcoed:** Some members of the Reserves Management Committee visited Kingcoed Meadows in December where we met Alastair Morgan, the contractor who cuts the hay and cuts the hedges. We arranged a plan for the future with hedges in our ownership only to be cut every other year. Annie Gorton-Harding, who lives nearby, has kindly agreed to be the Volunteer Warden for the site, cleaning the display board when needed and generally keeping an eye on things such as any rotten fence posts and sheep trapped in brambles. Thanks, Annie. Our grazier from former years, Eifion Davies from Ystradfellte, brought his hill sheep to the reserve in January for aftermath grazing.

**Wet Meadow:** The ponds are full after all the rain we have had this winter; Dick Coates reported frog spawn in the restored pond back in February.

A hedge-laying course was held in January on part of the hedge that we planted seven years ago at the northern boundary of the site. Richard Baker started work on the hedge but unfortunately injured his back and was unable to take the course but a colleague stepped in for which we are very grateful. About one third of the northern boundary hedge is laid this year; we are very grateful to Wye Valley National Landscapes for funding this work and the course.



Sheep grazed Wet Meadow over the winter but left at the end of February to allow spring flowers such as Wood Anemone, Dog Violets and Pignut in the woodland to recover. Unfortunately, the grazier brought in some hay bales as additional feed and these bales are made from improved grassland with Rye-grass and White Clover. The concern is that seeds from these plants may contaminate the flower-rich sward. Moreover, if the sheep had been recently treated with Avermectin for worm treatment, the chemicals in the sheep dung might 'undo' the work with Grazing Management's cattle last year and adversely affect dung beetles and other invertebrates. In future we will ensure that no 'foreign' bales are imported and that animals treated with worm killers cannot be on the site until at least a month after treatment.

Steph Tyler

**Flower Facts**

***Caltha palustris***

Also known as the Kingcup or Marsh marigold, *Caltha palustris* is a member of the *Ranunculus* or *Buttercup* family. It is a lovely clump-forming perennial, with glossy green leaves and bright open buttercup-type flowers.

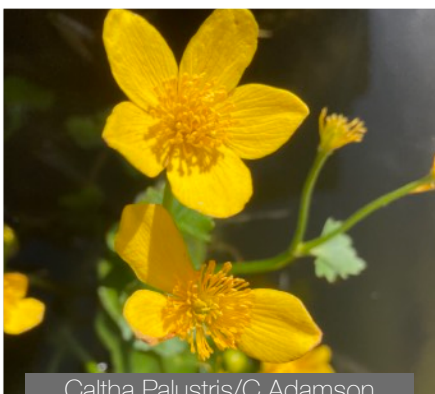
*Caltha palustris* is classified as threatened (*British and Irish Botany* 7(3):148-216 A new vascular plant Red List for Great Britain Nov 25). The decline is thought to result both from the loss and the fragmentation of suitable habitat.

The extraordinary luminosity of its flowers results from its microscopic structure. Each petal has an epidermis (outer layer of cells) overlying a microscopic air gap. The outer layer of the epidermis and the inner layer each reflect light very strongly, and between them the effect is akin to a pane of glass.

A lovely plant for a stream or pond-side, *Caltha palustris* enjoys damp conditions where it provides shelter for frogs and other pond life. Its petals reflect a large amount of UV light, attracting pollinators, and its nectar-rich flowers are a good source of food in early spring.

*Caltha palustris* is easy to grow, and is listed on many wetland plant websites for purchase. If you want to grow this lovely flower for its wildlife benefits be sure to buy the native form, not the cultivated double form which will not be as beneficial to pollinators.

*Sally Jones*



Caltha Palustris/C Adamson

**Hedgelaying at Wet Meadow**



*'We had a very enjoyable day learning about hedgelaying with Mike Jones who was an excellent teacher. He made it all totally achievable and we learnt about using the correct tools and about the different tree species. It did not rain at all and as there were only three of us we all got lots of practise and tuition.'*

*Sarah Clay; Photos by Jan Stevenson*

## Key highlights at Wet Meadow

### Section 7 species (Wales):

1 species, the ground beetle *Bembidion quadripustulatum*.

**Nationally Rare:** 2 species – the plant bug *Lygus pratensis* and crab spider *Xysticus acerbus*.

### Nationally Scarce:

12 species, including the beetles (*Acupalpus exiguus*, *Attactagenus plumbeus*, *Bembidion quadripustulatum*, *Enicmus fungicola*, *Polydrusus flavipes*, *Polydrusus formosus*, *Platyrhinus resinosus*, *Protapion varipes*), the flies (*Dioctria cothurnata*, *Bombylius canescens*, *Eurychaeta palpalis*), and the planthopper *Scottianella dalei*.

### New to Wales:

3 species – the weevil *Polydrusus flavipes*, the planthopper *Scottianella dalei*, and leafhopper *Zygina tiliae*.

### New to Vice-County 35

**(Monmouthshire):** 7 species – the beetles (*Acupalpus meridianus*, *Clambus pubescens*, *Enicmus fungicola*, *Pselaphus heisei*), the flies (*Sapromyza zetterstedti*, *Tomosvaryella palliditarsis*), and the springtail *Bourletiella hortensis*.

**Additional notable records:** ~20 seldom-recorded species in Wales (e.g., *Acupalpus exiguus*, *Oncopsis avellanae*, *Berosus affinis*, *Dioctria cothurnata*, *Platyrhinus resinosus*, *Xysticus acerbus*, *Tomosvaryella palliditarsis*, *Stenopsocus stigmaticus*, *Aleochara tristis*).

**38 Nationally/Wales Local species** (one seemingly new to Wales and four new to VC35).

**8 other species of interest** (including two seemingly new to VC35).

**Recent British additions:** 3 species – the seed beetle *Bruchidius varius*, also the ant *Lasius platythorax*, and the slug *Tandonia cf. cristata*.

## Invertebrate surveys at MMG reserves

Thanks to our team of expert botanists, MMG has a detailed record of the plants on our own Reserves. Our meadows, however, are also the home and refuge of a myriad of insects and other invertebrates. Members may remember that trustees decided last year to ask a good entomologist to pay monthly visits to Wet Meadow and Kingcoed Reserves to establish what was there.

Christian Owen did a marvellous job at these two MMG reserves and I summarise his findings below. Moreover, thanks to Wye Valley National Landscapes there was a DNA survey of hedge invertebrates at Wet Meadow.

Firstly, the findings at Wet Meadow near Trellech:

‘This diverse site features species-rich grassland, wetlands, streams, ponds, scrub, a small wood and hedgerows, maintained previously by hay-cropping and aftermath grazing with sheep but in 2025 through low-intensity grazing that promotes habitat heterogeneity and supports exceptional biodiversity.’

The survey recorded **485 invertebrate species**, with **60 (~12%)** of ‘conservation interest’.

The assemblage is dominated by beetles **Coleoptera** (181 species, 28 of ‘conservation interest’), true flies **Diptera** (80 species, 10 of ‘conservation interest’), and bugs **Hemiptera** (79 species, 10 of ‘conservation interest’).

**Trellech Wet Meadow** serves as a vital refuge for declining, rare, and scarce invertebrates, including numerous habitat specialists of regional, national, and Welsh/British significance.’

For the Climate Day of Action on the 6th of September 2025, the eDNA (environmental DNA) Consultancy and local participants trialed the terrestrial eDNA roller method on two hedges at Trellech Wet Meadow. One sample was taken from an older established hedgerow and the second from a relatively newly planted hedge. Each sample was analysed at the eDNA Consultancy’s laboratory, DNA extracted, and the invertebrate DNA sequenced to identify the community present.

Data from the older hedge sample yielded a much richer invertebrate community: 126 OTUs (operational taxonomic unit) in total, of which 84 identified to species, 28 to genus and 14 to family. By contrast, the new hedge yielded nine OTUs, of which six were identified to species and three to genus. As only one sample was collected from each hedge, and both samples were collected by different attendees, the comparative data is in itself interesting but not statistically robust.

## Key highlights at Kingcoed Meadow

### Section 7 priority species:

Long-horned Bee (*Eucera longicornis*) and two research only moths – Blood-vein (*Timandra comae*) and Shaded Broad-bar (*Scotopteryx chenopodiata*).

Vulnerable (RDB 2): Broad-banded Nomad Bee (*Nomada signata*).

### Nationally Rare (RDB 3):

Downland Villa *Villa cingulata*; mirid bug *Lygus pratensis*; spider *Xysticus acerbus*.



**Rich beetle assemblage** (119 species, 16 of conservation interest), e.g. weevils *Hypera meles*, *Protapion difforme*, *Protapion varipes*, *Sitona ambiguus*; ground beetles *Acupalpus exiguus*, *Syntomus obscuroguttatus*; click beetle *Oedostethus quadripustulatus* (new to VC35); flea beetle *Phyllotreta astrachanica*.

**13 species seldom recorded in Wales**, including the above plus *Anthicus antherinus*, *Araneus triguttatus*, *Edwardsiana frustrator*, *Pilophorus perplexus*.

**Two species recently new to Britain:** seed beetle *Bruchidius varius* and tachinid fly Yellow-clubbed Phasia.

**One species new to Wales:** planthopper *Scottianella dalei*.

The dataset revealed 99 unique genera detected from the older hedge and seven unique genera in the new hedge, with 101 genera detected overall. Highlighting the new roller method was successful in collecting eDNA from a broad range of invertebrates. Species of note: **Chafers** (Scarabaeidae) - The garden chafer *Phyllopertha horticola* was detected in both hedge samples, demonstrating that the roller method is effective for this group and could be used to detect the noble and variable chafers, both UK Priority species. **Click beetles** (Elateridae): The presence of *Athous bicolor* and *Agrypnus murinus* indicates that the method can detect click beetles and could be suitable for monitoring other elaterid species of conservation concern. **Rove beetles** (*Stenus* spp.): Detection of *Stenus nitidiusculus* suggests the method could also capture eDNA from the UK Priority species *Stenus longitarsis* and *Stenus palposus*. **Stoneflies** (*Brachyptera* spp.): The detection of *Brachyptera* confirms that stonefly eDNA, including UK Priority species within this genus, can be detected using this approach. **Pug moths** (*Eupithecia* spp.): *Eupithecia* DNA was recovered, showing that the method can detect moth taxa containing several UK Priority species.

The eDNA results were limited to just two hedges but Christian noted that several species that were identified from eDNA had not been seen by him, e.g. *Stenus nitidiusculus* and *Cylindroiulus caeruleocinctus*.

### Kingcoed Meadows

Christian reported: 'A total of 444 invertebrate species were recorded at Kingcoed Meadows during the survey, of which 52 are deemed to be of 'conservation interest'. These comprise:

3 Section 7 priority species (Environment (Wales) Act 2016); 1 Vulnerable (RDB 2); 3 Nationally Rare (RDB 3); 8 Nationally Scarce/Notable (including one new to Wales and one new to VC35); 33 Nationally/Wales Local; 1 Insufficiently Known (RDB K); 3 Other species of interest. Kingcoed Meadows is an important refuge for a number of rare and scarce invertebrates that are declining in the wider countryside, as well as for habitat specialists, many with restricted distributions. Some of these species are particularly significant in a regional (vice-county), Welsh, and/or British context.

Of particular interest was that a large proportion of the invertebrates found by Christian preferred tall grass and scrub. This is of importance when taking a hay cut as we should leave between 5 and 20% of the meadows uncut as an invertebrate refuge. The following year, a different area should be left uncut.

Steph Tyler

## New Red List



In November 2025, the Botanical Society of Great Britain (BSBI) published\* the latest version of the Red List for plants in Great Britain (*A New Vascular Plant Red List for Great Britain*).

Red Lists are an internationally recognised way of assessing the status of species and their level of threat, using standardised criteria developed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The new Red List for GB plants updates the previous list from 2005, providing crucial evidence for ecologists and other scientists working in nature conservation. It helps to highlight species most at risk and identify knowledge gaps, which can inform decision making both nationally and locally.

This new list is derived from around 50 million plant records collected by thousands of recorders across the UK. Mapping these against a set of criteria developed by the IUCN each species is assigned to a category:

- Critically Endangered (CR): Extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.
- Endangered (EN): Very high risk of extinction in the wild.
- Vulnerable (VU): High risk of extinction in the wild.
- Near Threatened (NT): Close to qualifying for a threatened category in the near future.
- Least Concern (LC): Widespread and abundant species.
- Data Deficient (DD): Insufficient information to assess extinction risk.

(It is useful to note the abbreviations used as you will often see them used by botanists in their surveys and reports.)

The results are, sadly, predictable although there are some good news stories. Of the 1,720 species evaluated for the new List, 434 species (26%) were assessed as threatened (Critically Endangered, Endangered or Vulnerable) and a further 140 as Near Threatened.

Of the good news, it's heartening to hear that there are signs that populations of some of our rare orchids are improving. The Fen Orchid, for example, has been the subject of targeted conservation efforts which seem to be having an effect. Populations of Bee and Pyramidal Orchids are more common than they were in 2005.

But the sad truth is that many plants which were once widespread in our countryside have continued to decline. Plants that are considered threatened include wildflowers - such as Common Milkwort, Common Restharrow and Betony - that are positive indicators of unimproved, species-rich grassland, the habitats that MMG aims to conserve in our county.

In the words of Dr Kevin Walker, BSBI Head of Science, "*Around a third of our flora is threatened and will continue to be, unless we tackle the main drivers head-on through reductions in damaging land management practices, pollution and climate change.*"  
(BSBI press release November 2025)

The Red List is made possible by the teams of BSBI recorders, like our own team including county botany recorders Stephanie Tyler and Elsa Wood, as well as Wendy Tyler-Batt, Tim Oliver (who both help with MMG surveys) and the rest of the Monmouthshire Botany Group, who feed data into collecting agencies (in this case, the SE Wales Biodiversity Records Centre SEWBRc). Their work is incredibly important as without the dedicated national team of experts, many of which are volunteers, this data would not be available.

You can view and download the new **Red Book** and a spreadsheet of the results here:

<https://britishandirishbotany.org/index.php/bib/article/view/195>

\*The Plant Red List is produced by BSBI and UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH), with funding from Natural England and supported by a working group (the Species Status Assessment Group) with representation from a range of independent experts and interested organisations.



*Caltha palustris*, classified as threatened in the Red List

In general, Red Lists are produced by specialists in their field, overseen by an inter-agency working group co-ordinated by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee [jncc.gov.uk](http://jncc.gov.uk), with members from Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and NatureScot.

The BSBI/UKCEH also produced the Plant Atlas, launched in March 2023. The online version features interactive distribution maps, text and graphics displaying data and trends for 3,495 plant species recorded across Britain and Ireland since the 1950s: <https://bsbi.org/plant-atlas-2020>

Other References:

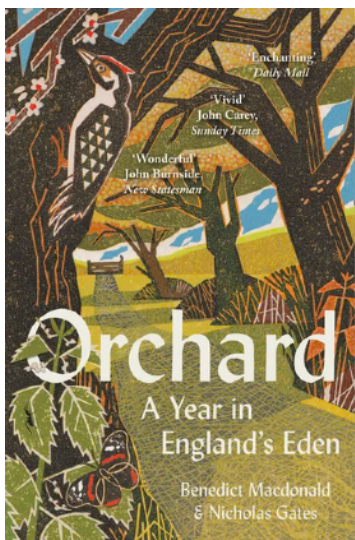
BSBI Press Release: <https://bsbi.org/about/news/press-releases/new-gb-red-list-for-vascular-plants>

For more information about Red Lists in general <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/red-lists-in-great-britain/>

Marilyn Dunkelman

## Book review

**Orchard: a year in England's Eden** by Benedict MacDonald and Nicholas Gates



Trawl the internet and you will find a fair number of academic research papers examining the various environmental benefits of traditional orchards in Europe. But for a fuller understanding of the interdependency of life thriving within the orchard's boundaries, I would strongly recommend reading *Orchard: a year in England's Eden*. This book, beautifully written and illustrated, is a month-by-month depiction of a traditional Herefordshire organic orchard. With charming lyricism, the authors vividly describe the life of the orchard, studying in minute detail the complexities of the web of life it supports. A rich ecosystem, it is a perfect example of symbiosis between humans and the natural world and demonstrates what has been and is being lost: the existence of such orchards has dramatically declined over the past century. Both authors are well known conservationists and broadcasters and their observations are often a revelation of a secret world that not many people have the privilege of witnessing.

Winner of *Richard Jefferies Society Award* for the most outstanding nature writing in 2020.  
HarperCollins Publishers, ISBN: 9780008333768

Clare Adamson 9

## Managing Orchard Grassland



High above the valley of the River Wye, in the grounds of Ty Mawr convent, is a small and beautiful orchard. Beautiful because the apple trees grow in a flower rich meadow. We were visiting with the MMG many years ago and were inspired to recreate something similar on our own smallholding.

We live on the border, just into Herefordshire, overlooking the Monnow valley. Herefordshire is renowned for its orchards - in 1664, the diarist John Evelyn wrote that the whole county was 'one entire orchard'; a 1698 estate map of Cwm Maddoc shows our barn surrounded by orchard.

But times have changed, and the meadow orchards which were once so common have become greatly reduced. When we moved here, in 1994, there was a remnant orchard of old, decaying apple trees by the neighbouring farmhouse; we loved the call of the little owls but, along with the orchard, they have long since disappeared.

We planted a few fruit trees when we first arrived but in 2007/8, we planted a small orchard of local and heritage apple varieties in a half acre of improved, i.e. fertilised, rye grassland. Traditional orchards, that is with trees widely spaced and grown on standard rootstocks, are disappearing from the landscape. Modern commercial practice favours bush orchards, with smaller trees planted in rows at a much greater stocking density. Widely spaced, fewer trees, however, means more grassland and it is now recognised that traditional orchards with both upper storey and under storey, when managed appropriately, can be a rich habitat for wildlife and provide micro-habitats for a wide range of species.



Scything at Ty Mawr



Spreading green hay



Quadrat

With Steph Tyler's advice, we introduced the wildflowers by scarifying the ground between the young trees with a chain harrow immediately after removing the hay crop. Once we had about 50% bare soil we seeded it by strewing green hay from a MMG member's garden in Penallt - a remnant meadow; then it was tilled to knock out the seeds before rolling it to ensure seed contact with the soil. Next spring the flowers appeared and for a few years we surveyed the number of flower species per square metre and were delighted with average results of around nine.

*'Recently though, there has been a renewed appreciation of meadow orchards for their environmental value. Appropriately managed, they provide habitat for many species of birds, insects, and other animals. Species diversity is so high, that they have even been referred to as the rain forest of Europe.'* *"Streubstwiesen" – the Meadow Orchards of Germany; 2021.*

So what is 'appropriately managed'? Our trees are grown without using any chemicals: in a traditional, unsprayed orchard predatory birds and insects control pests and bring about balance. In late summer we cut and clear the meadow. In the autumn, we harvest our fruit for apple juice and cider; the apple pomace (the remains of the apples after the juice has been extracted) is placed around the base of the tree - this helps to feed the trees and wasps but it's not entirely necessary and is more a way of managing a waste product. Of course, we don't fertilise the flower meadow. Ideally, the meadow should then be grazed.



Mowing the orchard



Narrowing hay cut



David &amp; Tracmaster

But apple trees grow larger - trees on standard rootstock can grow to between 20 to 30ft tall - and this has had implications for the management of the grass. All the time the trees were small we could use standard haymaking equipment: a PZ mower, haybob and New Holland baler for making small square bales all powered by my trusty MF 35 tractor. Year by year the area of grass being cut reduced as my haymaking equipment was squeezed out by the ever spreading branches until last year it reached the point when it became impossible to manoeuvre.

The solution last year came in the form of a TracMaster, a modern version of an Allen scythe, and David, its kindly operator. With a one metre cutting bar and two wheels it was able to get into the space under the trees. But it is hot and heavy work, and once cut the grass must be raked, forked and wheelbarrowed to a pile in a corner of the field, and either burnt or left to rot. Burning, with the immediate release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere feels wrong, but I have been told it is preferable to the slow release of methane (a more damaging greenhouse gas) that comes from a pile of rotting grass.

We are still looking for a sustainable method to maintain our orchard meadow. At Ty Mawr, I believe the grass is scythed by hand. In fact that is where we learnt to scythe on a MMG course. Traditionally a mower (*one man went to mow!*) could cut one acre in a day but half an acre is quite daunting for ageing hobbyists. Mob grazing by livestock is an appealing low effort and wildlife friendly alternative to cutting with blades, which has an adverse impact on both invertebrate and vertebrate life. But our orchard is too small an area for cattle, and they would browse the lower branches, while sheep are not effective grazers in a tall sward; and of course the trees need individual protection from livestock. However, there are benefits for wildlife in having areas of uncut grass even though that can have an impact on the flowers.

Although managing the orchard isn't necessarily straightforward and requires additional work such as pruning the trees, we haven't for one moment regretted our decision to create a meadow orchard. The seasonal changes are dramatic: from the bareness of Winter - we have just one ball of green and white mistletoe! - to blossom time humming with bees, and then the Spring green and the Summer yellow carpet of the meadow sward - with food opportunities for butterflies and invertebrates - segues to Autumn with

ripe fruit attracting the jays, winter thrushes and small mammals. It is, in contrast to the surrounding farmland, a biotope: a wildlife haven which benefits from minimal human intervention. Although we have not yet reproduced the wildflower rich sward we saw at Ty Mawr, we hope that our meadow orchard will continue, as it matures, to become a mosaic habitat: providing a refuge for wildlife by increasing habitat connectivity, extending the flowering season with early blossom prior to the flowering of the summer meadow, and feeding invertebrates, birds and mammals with fallen fruit.

Would we do anything differently? Perhaps if we had had more orchard knowledge, we would have sourced stem-builder trees (ie double grafted and therefore taller at 180cm), so that our tractor would pass easily underneath the branches. Hindsight indeed! But our orchard has its own charms: planted with different varieties of heritage trees from a Herefordshire Council orchard regeneration scheme, a local orchard grafting group, small fruit nurseries and some home grafted trees, each variety has its own character.

Even if you don't contemplate establishing a meadow orchard yourself, populating boundaries with blossoming and fruiting trees - for example, wild pear, damson, and crabapple (none of which require maintenance) - would extend the feeding season for wildlife and increase habitat connectivity.

*Jeremy Harris & Clare Adamson  
Hollow Ash Orchard, Cwm Maddoc*



*The meadow orchard in blossom and flower. Wild Pear in the hedgerow (left) smothered in blossom, 31st March 2026.*

## FAREWELLS

### Robert Fowles

We were very sorry to hear recently that Robert Fowles, a long-standing member from near Llangwm, died in 2025. He regularly attended our meetings with his wife Sylvia to whom we extend our condolences.

### Michael Robinson

The Meadows Group was sad to learn of Michael's death in February. He and Ann had been members of the Group for many years. When they lived near Shirenewton, they were very proud of their large flower-rich meadow and MMG Open Days were held there. Michael was very interested in trees and planted a broad belt of trees at the edges of the large field. Ann was a committee member for many years and a huge help in the production of our 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary book in 2013. Indeed, the launch of the book with wine and nibbles was hosted one evening overlooking the meadow by her and Michael at their former home.

They moved from Shirenewton to the Ludlow area of Shropshire some time ago but remained in contact. Our thoughts and condolences go to Ann at this difficult time.

### Edward (ED) Rogers

We were also so sorry to hear of the death of Edward (ED) Rogers, in April 2025, a farmer from Trellech and a member and helper of MMG over many years. He did many tasks with our warden Dick Coates on our Wet Meadow reserve.

Ed worked on the reserve doing many tasks, often using his small tractor which he bought from MMG some years ago. He never asked for payment for the reserve tasks.

## Seeking surplus sheep!

I am a long-time member of the MMG, and have here at Little Mill Farm (in north Monmouthshire) seven acres of ancient flowery hay meadows, which I keep in condition with a small flock of mostly Ryeland sheep. They were all born here - and because of the date I removed the last tups, I know that the youngest is nearly 11 years old. At present there are 19 of them.

It's gentle management that keeps them so healthy, but sadly they do die off one by one (mostly in the summer), and it will soon be the case that I don't really have enough to keep the meadows tidily grazed over the winter, and the other 3 acres of natural grassland pasture grazed over the summer.

So now I am writing to ask if any other members have a couple of surplus ewes that could be re-homed here, rather than sent to an abattoir? I would be most happy to have sheep that have been kept under a natural management regime, as mine haven't been medicated with anything at all for those 11 years; but whatever sheep are imported, they will have to cope with benign neglect too - so more Ryelands would be ideal! (Though any imported animals will need to be wormed with a non-ivermectin wormer, before arriving here.)

My sheep know me so well that they follow with a clap and a call, even into the barn for shearing, so I need to import new sheep by ones and twos, so that they learn the ropes from the rest of the flock and don't cause any management difficulties.

I feel sure there must be other flock owners in the group with surplus old ewes whom they would rather rehome than condemn! You would be very welcome to call by and visit them from time to time. Do please get in touch with me if we can help each other.

My email is [ann.eggleton@gmail.com](mailto:ann.eggleton@gmail.com).

*Ann Eggleton*



Ryeland sheep/ C Adamson

## CPRW Welsh Countryside Charity

The Welsh Countryside Charity formerly known as the Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales was founded in 1928. Since that time it has been very effective in advocating on behalf of Rural Wales. The Charity is committed to safeguarding our countryside for the benefit of communities, biodiversity, rivers, language and culture.

The Monmouthshire Branch is looking for new members to serve on the committee and take over key roles. We feel our aims are very much in tune with Monmouthshire Meadows so hope some members might be interested in helping us. We have a meeting every three months so it is not too onerous a commitment.

Please look at the website [cprw.org.uk](http://cprw.org.uk) for more information or contact [eryl.sheers@gmail.com](mailto:eryl.sheers@gmail.com) or [Carolineholtwilson@googlemail.com](mailto:Carolineholtwilson@googlemail.com)



## Dean Meadows Group Spring Meeting

The speaker is Dr Juliet Hynes, Head of Evidence, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. Focusing on the Forest of Dean, she will be highlighting aspects of Severn Treescapes, the beaver re-introductions carried out with Forestry England, heathland restoration with conservation grazing and the Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the Forest of Dean.

Dave Keen, meadow owner, will be describing his journey to improve his 2 acres of land to enhance biodiversity.

Dean Meadows Group Spring Meeting – Wednesday 29th April, 7.30pm, Blakeney Village Hall.

## Parish Grasslands Project

*Searching for Satyrus* is a film co-produced by a PGP member, Brockweir-based documentary film-maker Matt Fletcher. The film follows photographer Rena Effendi in her quest searching the Caucasus mountains for *Satyrus effendi*, a critically endangered butterfly named after her father, an enigmatic Soviet entomologist. Rena retraces his old butterfly-hunting routes in a landscape devastated by decades of war. *Satyrus effendi* is known to appear only once a year, on a militarised border no one is permitted to cross.

Blake Theatre, Monmouth, 9 May, 7.30pm

Tickets: [Searching for Satyrus | Underground Slate](http://www.undergroundslate.co.uk)

## No Mow May

Plantlife's **No Mow May** was founded eight years ago. Over that time the movement has grown, blossomed and bloomed into what it is today - thousands of people, all over the world, putting nature first.

We can all have a mini-meadow outside our door by simply stopping mowing the lawn from May onwards. No lawn is too small! Even the tiniest wild patch can provide vital food needed by bees and butterflies and give wildlife the best start to summer.

It may be teaching MMG members to suck eggs, but keeping 2 to 3 different grass lengths throughout the summer helps maximise flower variety and the nectar they produce. Keep paths and recreation areas mown short but frame these functional areas with a flowering lawn mown once every 4 to 8 weeks. This allows common, low-growing wildflowers to regrow and re-flower throughout the summer. Register your support:

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/campaigns/nomowmay/>

### Do you live in the Wye Valley National Landscape Area (formerly the AONB)?

If so, there are grants available for all sorts of work to encourage biodiversity from pond creation, hedge-planting and hedge-laying, fencing off woodlands and creating meadows. If you are interested, please contact me. It would be useful to know if you have an agricultural holding number and how many acres that you have. This is not mandatory for general grants.

Steph Tyler Email

[steph\\_tyler@hotmail.com](mailto:steph_tyler@hotmail.com)

### Dates for your diary

- **Thursday 16 April, 6.30pm**  
MMG AGM & Spring Meeting  
Llanishen Village Hall
- **24 - 30 April**  
The Big river Watch  
[Citizen Science Survey](#)
- **Wednesday 29 April, 7.30pm**  
Dean Meadows Group
- **Thursday 30 April, 7.30pm**  
GWT Nature Matters  
Usk Memorial Hall  
[Booking essential](#)
- **Saturday 2 May**  
The Wye Valley River Festival  
Monmouth
- **Saturday 9 May, 7.30pm**  
Film: *Searching for Satyrus*  
The Blake Theatre
- **Wednesday 20 May**  
World Bee Day
- **Saturday 6th June**  
MMG Open Meadows Day,
- **Saturday 13 June**  
Monmouth Bee Festival,

### Seeking a New Trustee: Treasurer

Are you passionate about wildflower meadows? Would you like to help us to make a difference here in Monmouthshire?

Monmouthshire Meadows Group is looking for a trustee to join our small friendly committee as Treasurer. As a CIO registered with the Charity Commission we are dedicated to promoting the conservation of meadows in Monmouthshire so as to restore the diversity of native plant and animal species. We manage three small reserves for biodiversity, and support our members with advice on meadow management.

We are looking for an enthusiastic team member who can commit to attend at least four meetings per year and to support us with our objectives. Good computer skills are essential; knowledge of meadow management is desirable but not essential.

Interested? To learn more please contact our President Dr. Steph Tyler or our Chair Dr. Sally Jones for a job description and an informal chat

Steph: [steph\\_tyler2001@hotmail.com](mailto:steph_tyler2001@hotmail.com)

Sally: [monmeadowsgroupchair@gmail.com](mailto:monmeadowsgroupchair@gmail.com)



### Contact MMG

- ✦ The MMG Newsletter is semi-annual, with Spring and Autumn editions. We love to learn about our members' meadow experiences and very much welcome contributions and photos from our MMG members.
- ✦ To get in touch, please email the editor Clare Adamson: [news.monmeadows@gmail.com](mailto:news.monmeadows@gmail.com)
- ✦ If you are new to MMG and would like to become a member, you will find details on how to join on our website: [monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk](http://monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk)
- ✦ Follow us on social media: Facebook and Instagram





Narcissus pseudonarcissus/ C Adamson



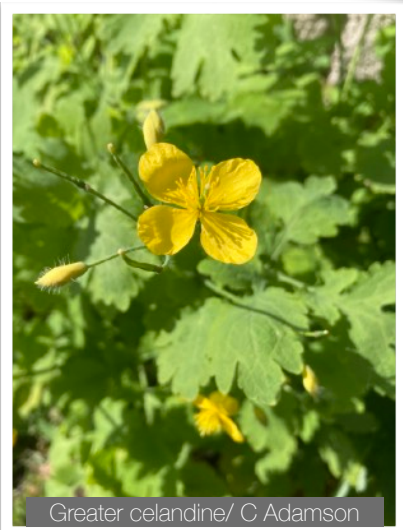
Wild daffodils/Martin Milling



Lesser celandine/ C Adamson



Primula vulgaris/ C Adamson



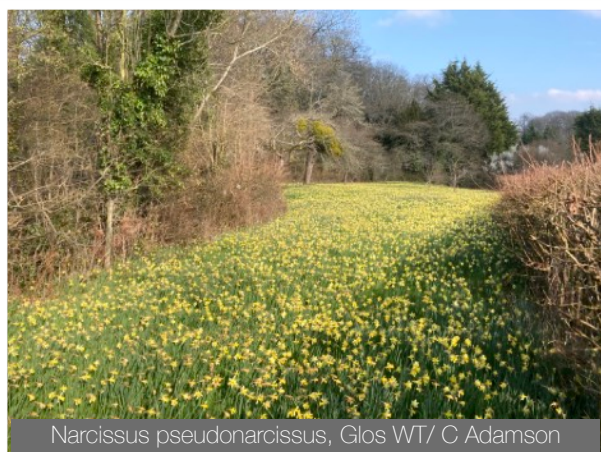
Greater celandine/ C Adamson



Dandelion/ C Adamson



Primula veris/ C Adamson



Narcissus pseudonarcissus, Glos WT/ C Adamson



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