

Monmouthshire Meadows

Issue 17

Registered Charity No. 1111345

Autumn 2012

Our aims are to conserve and enhance the landscape by enabling members to maintain, manage and restore their semi-natural grasslands and associated features

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To Join Us

Membership is the life blood of the Group. If you are not a member and would like to join, please contact Pam Lloyd on

01600 860924 or

lloyds08@tiscali.co.uk

or Jill Featherstone on

jillyfeather@yahoo.com

or use our [online membership form](#)

For general information please contact Maggie Biss on

01989 750740 or

monmouthmeadows@aol.co.uk

For contact details of our

Committee, as well as news, events and members' notices, go to our web site

www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk

From the Chair

Stephanie Tyler

No need to mention the awful spring and summer weather which deterred visitors to our open days and made hay-making a nightmare!

We were lucky in our first event – counting Green-veined Orchids in early May at Pam Lloyd's New Grove Farm and the adjacent GWT New Grove meadows. There was a good turn out and in all we saw well over 4,000 flowering spikes which makes this land the best in the county in terms of numbers.



Orchid counting at New Grove

Picture Keith Moseley

We also saw some other interesting plants including Adder's Tongue Fern. Green-veined (Green-winged) Orchids, a nationally threatened species, are only known from 20 sites in the county; five of these (other than New Grove) are on land belonging to MMG members with one large population occurring on a former member's field.

A new venture was holding two basic **training courses** in May on plant identification; we were able, thanks to GWT, to use Pentwyn Barn at Penallt where we discussed how to recognise plant families and looked at specimens and books; after coffee and biscuits we then went out into the meadows to look at plants. Participants seemed to enjoy it and be inspired to try to learn their plants.

A series of **Open Days** at members' land were sadly not well attended but those who did come enjoyed some lovely sites including Peter Smith's and Sheelagh Kerry's upland smallholding with orchid-rich hay meadows

between Bettws and Fforest Coal Pit, Richard Cornock's smallholding at Leechpool near Portskewett, the small fields and woods at Parson's Grove in a basin alongside the Cas Troggy at Earlswood owned by Chris and Joni Gooch and further afield a visit to Chris Parson's hay meadows and orchard near Littledean in the Forest. Chris and friends have set up the Dean Meadows Group run along similar lines to MMG.

Surveys have been carried out for at least 12 new MMG members on land from half an acre to 76 acres and advice given on management to maintain and enhance their land. Some wonderful species-rich fields have been 'found' at various sites including at Pandy, Gilwern, Newchurch, Cwmcarn and

Penyfan. Harebells and Wild Thyme, Agrimony, Betony, Field Scabious, Burnet Saxifrage and Tormentil were among the many species seen at these sites. One particularly important site with Wild Clary, Butterfly Orchids and many other exciting species was just over the border into Herefordshire! At a meeting of the **Local Wildlife Sites panel** (CCW, MCC, GWT and MMG) in early October four more MMG members' sites were accepted as meeting the criteria for a Local Wildlife Site; as such owners are eligible for **Natural Assets funding** for capital works such as fencing and hedge-laying. Already several MMG members have benefitted from this funding from the Welsh government and Monmouthshire County Council, administered through GWT. If any MMG member with a Local Wildlife Site wants to carry out some work, for example to facilitate grazing, then please contact Rebecca Price at GWT.

SEWBReC held at **bioblitz** at Ty Mawr Convent land at Lydart on 23 June supported by GWT and MMG; some 'new' plants were found but insects won the day with a Garden Tiger moth a star attraction. Three months later MMG organised a **work task** cutting the small wet pasture at Ty Mawr Convent with our Tracmaster machine pushed by Lindsay Tyler and Bill Howard. A few hardy volunteers - Sarah Cheese,

Jon and Marilyn Dunkelman, Nigel Seabourne and Martin Milling raked and pitchforked off the cut material into piles for Grass Snakes and Slow Worms (see article by Jon Dunkelman). We avoided the wettest lower area where Devil's-bit Scabious and Ragged Robin were still flowering. A few weeks later a few of us including Julia Gregson finished the task when we let our two Exmoor Ponies out into the pasture.



Picture Julia Gregson

The ponies have been moved around to whoever wants them and there is now a waiting list! They spent many weeks on Far Hill, Llanishen and then went to two sites in the Whitebrook valley from one of which they escaped and went on a walk-about up the valley, over to Lydart and Penallt. Luckily

someone had the presence of mind to open a field gate at Kate Humble's Meend Farm and put them in a six acre field. That was great for the ponies but one was very unwilling to be caught and moved elsewhere. Mission accomplished though thanks to Alan and Steph Poulter and Julia Gregson and the ponies spent a few days at Ty Mawr wet pasture before going on to The North where they are at the time of writing.

The MMG Committee is busy thinking of ways to celebrate our 10th anniversary next year. All ideas welcomed. Our website has been revamped by Marilyn Dunkelman so please take a look at it; Marilyn has put in many hours of work to make it user friendly and attractive.

GWT collected seed for us with our jointly owned seed harvester and that has been distributed to members hoping to enhance their grassland. We were also able to sell some at Monmouth Show where we shared a tent with CPRW. Thanks to CPRW, particularly David and Eryl Sheers (MMG members) for enabling MMG to have a free stand at the show.

We are now affiliated to the CALM Alliance, a consortium of bodies that are fighting revised plans for a motorway across the Gwent Levels.

Steph Tyler

Founder Member Ida Dunn Reaches a Century!



At our inaugural meeting in 2003, a very petite and smart silver haired lady with a strong Midlands accent and accompanied by a much younger gentleman (at least in his late 60s and described as one of her past drama students) was full of enthusiasm for the start up of Monmouthshire Meadows. She could hardly contain her excitement when she showed us her list of wild flowers that she had found on her land. We looked at her list in cynical disbelief, particularly concerning the numbers of butterfly orchids she had in her field in Maryland, The Narth.

A survey by Steph Tyler proved that Ida was absolutely right and from that moment Ida's garden and meadows became one of our iconic sites to recommend to anyone who would like to see a truly lovely ancient wild flower meadow or aspire to have a wild flower meadow of their own.

Despite being in her 90s, Ida was always delighted to open on our Open Days over the years and held vivacious court from her veranda to many visitors.

Ida reached her 100th year this summer. A couple of years ago, after a stroke, she had to move from her beloved cottage and wild flowers to a care home near relatives in the Midlands.

She celebrated her birthday in true Ida style with a special lunch at the care home and then a party at a special venue with cake and champagne.

We are so fortunate that her garden and meadows have now been taken over by a young couple who have become members and are willing to open for our Open Day next year.



Review of our Autumn Meeting

Over 60 people attended the annual autumn meeting on 18th October at Monmouth Priory. Hearing about members' meadows had proved popular in the past so we repeated the formula this year with talks from four members with fields of rather different characters. Ann Eggleton is a farmer and talked about the old pastures on the organic farm near Newcastle that she started up with her husband over 20 years ago. At the outset, they ignored the advice of the Soil Association to plough up the pastures and re-sow them on a 5 year cycle. Instead they have followed the traditional rhythm of cutting a proportion of the pastures for hay around the end of June and then putting animals to graze them. The wide range of grasses and herbage in the pastures ensure that the animals obtain all the minerals they

need with no need for the special licks that are required under other farming systems. Some of Ann's fields include Naked Ladies, a beautiful, mauve, autumn-flowering crocus species. These are poisonous to livestock so a previous farmer on the land had tried to eradicate them by ploughing and collecting the corms at the surface. Ann is convinced that the stock won't eat them and so the Naked Ladies are slowly returning.

Ann's meadows are essential for year-round feeding of her animals. Glynis Laws described a meadow where no animals are grazed and where the focus is limited to increasing plant diversity and benefit to wildlife. Steph Tyler has described how this meadow had been transformed from a 'lawn' to a Local Wildlife Site in a previous newsletter. Simply



Steph Tyler talks to Martin Milling

Picture Ann Robinson

leaving the meadow to grow and cutting it for hay in late summer has resulted in a steady increase in diversity of plant species. Glynis described the characters of different parts of the meadow and the plants associated with them, including the Broad-leaved Helleborines that were found in the meadow for the first time this year.

Despite achieving a species-rich meadow with relative ease, there is still some hard work involved in brush cutting the edges and a large patch of wet meadow and raking off the cuttings but this is nothing compared to the enormously hard work that has faced Sarah Cheese. Sarah and Tom bought a field at

Whitebrook that, despite being a Local Wildlife Site, was overgrown with brambles and they have been conducting a valiant fight against them to make way for flowers. The slashed growth is piled up for compost and the heaps have proved an attraction for slow worms and grass snakes. These now live happily together under sheets of corrugated metal. The site offers ideal conditions for Bluebells and Sarah described how she is encouraging the spread of these as well as an increase in the range of other plants.

Our final speaker, Marion Stainton, focused more on meadows as a design feature in her garden. Areas of grass and flowers grow in a small orchard and field, linking the more formal garden with the agricultural fields beyond. Pathways and clearings allow access to the meadow areas but also ensure that these are clearly part of the garden. At the same time, management is resulting in an increase in meadow species. At a time when many gardeners are interested in including meadow areas, Marion's talk showed how this can be achieved very effectively.

Following the talks, a cold supper was provided and members had the chance to chat with others until the evening finished.

Glynis Laws

Demise of The Grasslands Trust



The following statement, taken from the web site of the Trust, contains some rather sad news . . .

"It is with enormous regret that the Trustees of The Grasslands Trust have decided to place the charity into liquidation. This is due to a combination of factors: the unexpected collapse of our plans to purchase a farm in Herefordshire late last year, a decline in unrestricted income essential to support running costs and difficulties securing matched funding for projects. Despite a concerted effort by staff to generate emergency funds and cut costs, The Grasslands Trust is unable to continue trading lawfully.

This is an immensely sad time given what the charity has achieved in the ten years of its existence. We would like to extend an enormous thank you to all our staff, supporters, funders, volunteers, partners and friends who have helped us since 2002.

Jon Valters
Chairman

25 September 2012"

Plantlife Road Verge Campaign

Plantlife have been running a road verge campaign this summer to draw attention to the need for appropriate management of roadside verges. Management is crucial not just for the flowers but for the wildlife that depend on them. Readers of the Plantlife website www.plantlife.org.uk had the chance to learn more about road verge management and to rate the performance of their own councils. Monmouthshire County Council was not highly rated, which was not too surprising given the concerns expressed by some MMG members about the treatment that some of our verges received.

The best flower-rich verges in Monmouthshire have been marked with white posts to show the start and finish of stretches that need special treatment. Often these areas include orchids or other rare plants, or they are particularly species-rich. These areas should be left until late August or September and, to avoid enrichment of the soil, the cuttings should be raked off rather than mulched. Without raking off, there is a danger of invasion by Nettles and Cocksfoot Grass and other undesirable species that will outcompete the flowers.

Steph Tyler and Nicola Stone from Gwent Wildlife Trust have recently met up with Jerry Lewis of MCC and concerned members Robert and Lynne Jones of Five Lanes to discuss road verge management following the poor ratings that the council received. Another local problem too is some householders regularly mowing verges alongside their property to 'tidy' it up which means no flowers at all.

We learnt that the agreement with Highways about management of the road verge reserves does necessitate removing cut material although this rarely happens. Many of the verge reserves are on steep banks so fortuitously enrichment from the cut material is reduced by it washing off and nutrients leaching out. However, we should ensure that flatter verge reserves are managed sympathetically and contact Nigel Leaworthy or Roger Hoggins of the Council's Highways about any problems.



Picture Gwent Wildlife Trust

If you are concerned about the verges in Monmouthshire, there are some things that you can do

- Plantlife's road verge campaign for 2012 has finished and there is no information on their website for now. However, they say they will be back next year. So do keep an eye on your verges next summer and contribute to the campaign.
- Volunteer to adopt a verge near you and to rake off the grass after it has been cut.
- Let us know if you have identified an interesting, flower-rich road-verge that has not been marked with white posts already so that these can be surveyed and marked up. Now is the time to do this rather than wait for the mower to come along next year.

We discussed more sympathetic management with wide scale removal of cut grass to avoid mulching but Jerry Lewis advised that contractor costs and lack of suitable equipment mean that this is unlikely to happen. Rob and Lynne Jones are keen to trial an area of road verge along the Newport to Chepstow road where the ground is rotavated to allow seeds to germinate and where some annuals are sown to give colour for people as well as nectar and/or pollen for insects. We agreed it was essential to get the Caerwent Community Council on board and to publicise this so that the activities of private mowers was deterred or curtailed.

Glynis Laws & Steph Tyler

The Rewards of Volunteering

Report of the Ty Mawr Work Party

As summer finally arrived, in September, Marilyn and I joined the troop of MMG volunteers and spent a happy Sunday morning cutting, raking and clearing the wet meadow at Ty Mawr convent. This was our first time helping out at what is a regular event, this year undertaken in exchange for the seed that Gwent Wildlife Trust collects for MMG. (The Trust manages the grounds for the convent under a farm tenancy agreement.) It's hard work made easier by many hands and the nifty little Tracmaster two-wheeled tractor which was bought three years' ago with a grant from the Countryside Council for Wales (thank you CCW!)



The wet meadow at Ty Mawr convent



Lindsay, Bill and Tracmaster – that's the one in the middle

Hawkmoth record in Gwent for forty years (1972), and only the ninth county record ever!

A real privilege to see, and proof that volunteering brings its own rewards.

Jon Dunkelman

The effort is worthwhile. At the Ty Mawr Bioblitz in June species recorded in the wet meadow included Hemp Agrimony, Marsh Bedstraw, Marsh Pennywort, Ragged Robin, Bog Stitchwort, Water Forget-me-not as well as several species of fern and many grasses.

But the most exciting part of the day came as we were leaving, when Steph and Lindsay spotted this elegant little fellow – well not so little in fact. It's a Privet Hawkmoth larva (*Sphinx ligustri*), and according to the Vice County Moth and Butterfly Recorder, Martin Anthoney at SEWBReC, although it is found in many counties it is the first Privet



Privet Hawkmoth larva

A special thanks from the Committee to Jon and Marilyn, Martin Milling, Nigel Seabourne, Sarah Cheese and Lindsay Tyler for all their hard work cutting, raking off and pitchforking into large piles for grass snakes.

Million Ponds Project

Looking for Sites

Pond Conservation are running the Million Ponds project which aims to create a network of new ponds across the UK for the benefit of endangered freshwater plants and animals. They are looking for sites for new ponds, and Wales Pond Officer Anna Bransden has sent the following request for help:



"You may already be aware that over the last three years we have been running Phase 1 of the Million Ponds Project, a pond creation scheme that provided training, advice and funds for the creation of an extensive network of clean water ponds around England and Wales. We are currently entering Phase 2 of the project which aims to build upon the success of Phase 1 by ensuring that Britain once again has one million ponds across its landscape.

In order to do this we are currently looking to identify further sites where the creation of networks of ponds could take place in the future. Specifically we are looking for sites where the land use is non-intensive or natural/semi natural resulting in the pond having a clean water source. Places where there is a high risk of agricultural run off or run off from roads would not be considered suitable. We are looking for sites where a number of ponds could be created and we are also looking to create ponds for conservationally important species.

We have already consulted with CCW and other organisations on this subject and now I am writing to you to ask if you know of any sites that you think would be suitable for pond creation and that would benefit wetland plant species. Alternatively, perhaps you know of sites that are no longer suitable for a particular plant interest and that require management to restore them to the correct conditions. We would also be very interested to know about these sites as well.

If you know of anywhere suitable then please get in touch with me on **07738 564128** or **abransden@pondconservation.org.uk**

Anna Bransden

Visit www.pondconservation.org.uk/millionponds

www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk

Welcome to our New Members

What a busy time it has been since April, welcoming new members. I am delighted to welcome the following: Ruth Allen & Ian Draycott from The Doward ; Jo & Nick Brooks from Broadoak; Glenda & Ed Buck from Haterall Hil, Cwmyoy; Cheryl Cummings from Monmouth; Catherine Hall & Hugh Marsh from Whitebrook; Nicholas and Tina Jefferies from Glewstone; Helen Kenneally from Itton; William King from Kingcoed; Gillian Knowland from Newchurch; Mark Lawton from Gilwern; Claire Carter & David Lewis from Little Mill; Denise Meek from Brynderi; Bertie Newbery from Lydart; Stephen Roberts from Llanfair Kilgeddin.

It is lovely to see that people are joining from across the county and from the border areas, which means that we must be doing something right in letting people know of our existence.

We like to offer all new members a site visit so that we can survey their land and offer them advice on land management, so if any of the above haven't had a visit yet please get in touch.

Pam Lloyd

Your Web Site

MMG has a new web address
www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk
(old links will be redirected automatically).

The site has a section for members' news and announcements. If you have something to include, please send it by email to our web administrator Marilyn Dunkelman - marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk or use the Contact Us form on the site.

Dates for your Diary

Check our web site www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk for news and updates on events

Friday 9th November: *Dean Meadows Group Autumn meeting* at the West Dean Centre, Bream starting at 7:30pm. £5 for non-members. More information on the group's web site www.deanmeadows.org.uk/events/

Tuesday 6th and 20th November and Saturday 8th December: *Work tasks at Rogiet Countryside Park* near Caldicott. Contact Steph Tyler for details

Saturday 24th November: *Practical Hedge Laying*, an instruction day organised by Dean Meadows Group and led by Andrew Williams of the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley Hedge Layers Association, cost £50, must be pre-booked. See www.deanmeadows.org.uk/events/ or contact Andrew on 01452 760899 or 07905 547618

Sunday 2nd December : *MMG work task day* - venue to be decided. See our website for updates

Saturday 9th February 2013: *Gwent Recorders' Meeting* at Greenmeadow Community Farm, near Cwmbran. More information to follow on SEWBReC's web site www.sewbrec.org.uk/event/events-calendar/

Saturday 2nd March 2013: *Hazel Wattle Hurdle Making*, an instruction day organised by Dean Meadows Group and led by Andrew, cost £50, must be pre-booked. See www.deanmeadows.org.uk/events/ or contact Andrew on 01452 760899 or 07905 547618

Thursday 11th April 2013: *MMG Tenth Anniversary Celebration and Spring Meeting*. Venue to be decided so keep an eye on our web site

Sundays 9th and 16th June 2013: *Monmouthshire Meadows Open Days*. This year we are holding open days over two weekends to give a better chance for good weather

Saturday 29th June 2013: *Grasses Identification course* for beginners at Pentwyn Farm

Monmouthshire Meadows Group is grateful for all the help both financial and physical given by our members.

We are also indebted to the following for their sponsorship and help -

Tom Ward-Jackson of Tidy Towns has been very helpful to MMG in obtaining funding for our insurance costs.

The Countryside Council of Wales (CCW) has been immensely supportive and we are particularly grateful to **Rob Bacon** and also to **Miki Miyata-Lee** for all their help with our applications for funding. We are most grateful to **Environment Wales** for helping fund surveys of members' fields in 2011/2012 and also to **Alison Colebrook of Wildlife Trusts of Wales** for her guidance over Environment Wales funding procedures.

Charles Morgan of PONT - the Welsh Grazing Project has provided useful advice to MMG on local graziers

