

# Monmouthshire Meadows

Issue 28

Registered Charity No. 1111345

Spring 2018

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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## From the Chair

Stephanie Tyler

Winter is a relatively quiet time for the Group – time to assess what we need to do during the coming year and planning summer events. With membership steadily increasing (26 new members up to December 2017) there are always landowners still to visit to carry out surveys and give advice. Thanks to Elsa Wood and Sheelagh Kerry for helping with this important work.

A major event for MMG in the autumn was the launch of the wonderful meadow fungus book published by the Group. The book was written by Elsa Wood and Jon Dunkelman with photos by them and particularly by Malcolm Schuyl and Keith Moseley. Around 70 people attended the mid-morning launch held at Gwent Wildlife Trust's Pentwyn Barn at Penallt and attendees had the chance of a walk around Pentwyn and Bush Meadows, led by experts Roger Evans and the authors, before the short speeches and then a wonderful buffet prepared by Elsa Wood and her daughter, Gemma. The fungus book has been selling very well and had excellent reviews in British Wildlife.

Our autumn meeting went well with an excellent talk by Dr Rupert Perkins on meadow butterflies in the UK and Europe and a much-appreciated

buffet supper spear-headed by Judith Carruthers and with contributions from most committee members and some others including Elsa Wood.

*continued/-*



Identifying specimens at our launch event for *Grassland Fungi: A Field Guide* at Pentwyn Farm Barn in October  
Picture: Keith Moseley

On our reserves there has been some activity. Unwanted green hay bales were cleared off the field at Ida's Meadow, the front of hedges were trimmed at Kingcoed (we are only cutting the tops every second or third year) and sheep have been grazing there over winter, whilst at Wet Meadow at Trellech much work has been carried out by Dick Coates and by Gwent Wildlife Trust volunteers. The western fences have been strengthened to stop neighbours' sheep getting in, the hedge alongside the doctor's surgery has been laid and brash removed by MMG volunteers and a good start has been made on renovating the old silted-up pond that was overgrown with willows over in the west of the site. We now have a Customer Reference Number from the Welsh Office Agriculture Department and Entitlements so we will be

able this coming year to claim Basic Farm Payments on all our land.

MMG was delighted to receive a further cheque of over £3,000 from the solicitors dealing with Ida Dunn's estate. For those who didn't know her Ida was a wonderful lady who lived to be over 100 years old and owned the house and land at Four Acres, Maryland. She was a great MMG supporter and left us some money and through her executors we received the important acre of land full of Greater Butterfly Orchids at Maryland as an MMG Reserve, now renamed in her memory.

*Steph Tyler  
Chair, MMG*

## This Year's Open Meadows

Instead of holding a one-day event, this year we are planning afternoon and evening Open Meadows, to which MMG members and supporters, their family and friends are invited. As always, we are very grateful to our hosts who allow us to come on to their land to enjoy the results of their hard work.

The first is on the afternoon of Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> June at Blaentrophy Farm, Grosmont, NP7 8HN. This extensive site is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), owned by MMG members Ruaridh and Caroline MacDonald. Meet at 2.30pm for a walk in the meadows, which will be open until 5pm.

On the evening of Friday 29<sup>th</sup> June, Sheelagh Kerry and Peter Smith will be welcoming people at their home at Ty Major, Forest Coal Pit, near Abergavenny, from 4.30pm.

We shall also be present with our stall at Gwent Wildlife Trust's Open Farm Sunday on 10<sup>th</sup> June at their Pentwyn Farm Reserve, and at the Chepstow and Usk shows.

Full details of these and other events we are planning will be on our web site and will be emailed to members in our regular bulletins.



## Contact MMG

*If you are not a member and would like to join contact our membership secretary Cecilia Davies on **01281 681222** or [cecilia691222@gmail.com](mailto:cecilia691222@gmail.com) or use our [online membership form](#)*

*For general information please contact Sheelagh Kerry on **01873 890598** or [smk@smithecology.co.uk](mailto:smk@smithecology.co.uk)*

*Contributions to the newsletter or items for the web site can be sent to the editor, Marilyn Dunkelman [marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk](mailto:marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk)*

*Contact details for our Committee, as well as our news and events and information about our meadow reserves at Kingcoed and Maryland, are on our web site [www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk](http://www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk)*

*Follow us on Twitter @MonMeadows*



## Spring Social and AGM

### Wednesday 25 April at Llanishen Village Hall

Our AGM and Spring Social is at Llanishen once again this year, starting at 7pm. The evening commences with the AGM, followed by a presentation by Colin Cheesman, Programme Director of **Plantlife Cymru**, the Welsh section of the national plant charity. Colin will talk on the work of Plantlife in Wales, particularly concentrating on grasslands, and will show a short film by Trevor Dines, Plantlife's Botanical Specialist, on creating a meadow

As usual there will be a buffet supper after the talk, with plenty of time for chatting with fellow meadow enthusiasts.

Llanishen Village Hall is situated on Church Road East in the village of Llanishen, just off the B4293 between Chepstow and Monmouth, post code NP16 6QE. There is a signpost indicating the route to the hall from the main road, and there is ample parking. You will find a map on the hall's web site [www.llanishenhall.org.uk](http://www.llanishenhall.org.uk)



There's a charge to cover the cost of the buffet (which includes a glass of wine) but if you are a member and just want to come to the talk it's free (with a small charge to non-members):

- Members: £14.00 each
- Non-members: £17.00 each
- Meeting only: £2.00 non-members (members free)

**Please book in advance** as we need to know how many people to cater for. You can book online on our web site or contact Marilyn Dunkelman: telephone 01600 860031, or email [marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk](mailto:marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk)

Send payment by cheque, made payable to Monmouthshire Meadows Group, to Marilyn at The Beeches, The Narth, Monmouth NP25 4QL. If you prefer to pay using Internet banking we'll send account details when we receive your booking.

If you would like us to arrange a lift for you, let us know.

### Farewell to Glynis

Recently I was sad to learn from Glynis that she and her husband Graeme will be leaving their lovely home and meadow at Far Barn near St Maughans in June and moving to near Hidcote in Oxfordshire. Glynis has been a good friend of the Meadows Group. She welcomed visitors to her meadow one year for our Open Day; she wrote a chapter in our anniversary book about her meadow and was a key player in bringing about the book's publication; she was on the MMG Committee for several years and carried out surveys of members' fields especially around St Maughans. In this issue she wrote the article on dating meadows and three years ago devised a questionnaire for MMG members and analysed the results to find out what members most valued. She has helped the Group in many other ways, not least in preparing food for our buffet suppers after our indoor meetings.

We wish Glynis and Graeme well in their new life.

*Steph Tyler*

### Welcome to our New Members

We are delighted to welcome the following new members who have joined the group recently:

Mary Barkham, Abergavenny; Ian Blandford, London; Martin Davies, Abergavenny; Catherine Holland & Phil Bryan, Trellech; Julian and Lesley Lobley, Llangovan; Claralynn Nunamaker, Forres; Ryan Walker, Hendre; Peter & Rose Wall, Caerleon; Kelly Weare, Usk

We would like to apologise to Richard & Amanda Newhouse for giving Richard the wrong name in the last edition of the newsletter.

*Cecilia Davies, Membership secretary*



## Meadow Butterflies

### A Personal View by Rupert Perkins

*Dr Perkins was our speaker at our Autumn Meeting last year, where he showed some stunning photos from his travels in the UK and Europe*

Sitting in a wild flower meadow on a warm sunny day is the quintessential sign of summer for many. The buzzing of insects amongst a plethora of coloured flowers is magnificent enough, but for me the highlight of the insect fauna are the butterflies, although I should not forget the day flying moths as well. Blues, Whites and, if you're lucky, Fritillaries, flutter as if aimless from flower to flower but in reality are following precise flight paths in search of nectar, or in the case of the males patrolling in search of a mate.



*Adonis Blue*

Sadly, in Britain we have lost much of our meadow habitat, and the remaining sites are often fragmented or, due to over-nourishment with nutrients or inappropriate grazing, have lost their diversity of flora and in turn are unable to support such a high diversity of insects as found on the continent. Of course the climate plays a role in the lower species richness in our meadows, with many species being at the edge of their range or not found this side of the English Channel at all. However changes in land use have certainly reduced the abundance and richness of butterflies in British meadows.

Nevertheless, they are still a natural wonder we should cherish and conserve. Many sites are now managed by organisations such as Butterfly Conservation and the National Trust. Many others are well-managed by private landowners who are keen on maintaining biodiversity islands in our landscape. On these sites we can still enjoy the beautiful sites in Spring and Summer of the likes of Adonis Blue in May and later again in August, sparkling as blue jewels flying between flower heads. In August they are joined by Chalkhill Blues and throughout the year by the Common Blue, often taken for granted but no less special.

On protected reserves, such as Collard Hill in Somerset and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust's Daneway Banks, our increasing understanding of butterfly ecology has enabled the reintroduction of the Large Blue. With the correct grazing regime and management, the habitat is conserved as an ecosystem supporting not only the Large Blue, but also the ant species (*Myrmica spp.*) on which it is dependent for completion of its life cycle. Without understanding the role of grazing to maintain a short turf for the correct temperature for the ants, we would not manage the site to enable this hugely successful reintroduction.



*Large Blue*

It's not just Blues, look closely at the darting orange Skippers, Large, Small and Essex often flying together but needing close examination for identification. The latter has expanded greatly in the UK and is now quite common in South Wales.

The opposite end of the size spectrum is filled by the Fritillaries, with Small Pearl-bordered and Dark Green Fritillary found in many of our local grassy meadows in June and Silver-washed Fritillaries along woodland rides and hedge edges. These stunningly beautiful butterflies are a real pleasure to watch with their strong powerful flight and intricate patterning. If you're lucky and in the right location other Fritillary species can be found, such as Heath (in Exmoor for example) and High Brown (more local, it still flies in the Vale of Glamorgan around Ewenny). The Aberbargoed meadows, managed by Caerphilly Borough Council, are home to the stunning Marsh Fritillary.



But don't overlook the Browns. Marbled White (a Brown!) is a stunning black and white meadow butterfly flying from June, but the less eye-catching Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Gatekeeper and Small Heath are also highly attractive when you take the time to look closely.

Once you get hooked on butterflies, if you're lucky enough to travel to Europe you'll find the British list of 59 species is the tip of the iceberg! From lowland meadows to the wonderful flower rich alpine meadows of the Picos de Europa,

Pyrenees and Alps, there is a huge range of butterflies to enjoy and puzzle over their identification. Provencal, Knapweed, Heath, Meadow, Glanville, Small Pearl-bordered, Pearl-bordered, Spotted, Marbled and Lesser Marbled are all Fritillaries you can see flying at a single site. Then the Blues can be a mix of Common, Chapmans, Eros, Escher's, Turquoise, Chalkhill, Mazarine, Silver-studded and Idas Blue, puddling for salts on a single area of stony ground. As well as our two montane ringlet (*Erebia*) species, Scotch Argus and Mountain Ringlet, you can see Gavarnie, Autumn, Yellow-spotted, Large, Water, Dewy, Silky, Chapmans, Aran Brown and many, many others. But I warn you, you'll become addicted and spend a long time pouring over butterfly books! There are worse ways to spend a sunny day.

As magical as this European diversity is however, it detracts nothing from enjoying our butterflies in our remaining British wild flower meadows. Conserving these priceless habitats must remain a priority so future generations can enjoy them as much as we do.

An essential, and rewarding aspect of butterfly conservation is recording sightings, so please do write down your sightings and send them in to our county recorder, Dr Martin Anthoney. His email is [chemlep@btinternet.com](mailto:chemlep@btinternet.com). Include a date, place, the grid reference if possible and the number of each species seen.

*Dr Rupert Perkins, Cardiff University*





## How Old is Your Meadow

### Glynis Laws

Last summer Ken Thompson, a plant biologist with an occasional column in the Daily Telegraph gardening section, explained how counting the petals on your buttercups can be used to work out the age of your meadow.

He found the method described in the journal *Annals of Botany*. Plants grow by cell division. Each time a cell divides there is the possibility of a genetic mutation that will continue through successive cell divisions. The



*Creeping Buttercup* by Clément Bardot [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons

older the plant, the more mutations it will have accumulated. One such mutation affecting buttercups results in extra petals. The more flowers with this mutation in your field, the older your buttercups are and, because it can be assumed that a meadow is as old as the buttercups that grow in it, the older your meadow.

The method works only with Creeping Buttercup because Meadow Buttercup and Bulbous Buttercup reproduce by seed whereas Creeping Buttercup depends mostly on vegetative reproduction.

If you'd like to date your meadow, all you have to do is gather 100 Creeping Buttercup flowers from across the meadow and count the number of flowers you find with more than five petals. Each flower with extra petals is considered equivalent to seven years. If you find just one flower with extra petals among the

100 you pick that would indicate a young meadow. The more flowers with extra petals you have, the older your meadow is likely to be.

It would be nice to put together results from MMG members. If you are interested to contribute, here is a summary of what to do:

1. Check that you have Creeping Buttercup, *Ranunculus repens*. The clue is in the 'creeping'. Ignore flowers from Meadow Buttercup, *R. acris*, or Bulbous Buttercup, *R. bulbosus*. If you are uncertain, ask for advice.
2. Collect 100 flowers at random from round your meadow. Don't check the petals before you pick them!
3. Count how many of the flowers have more than five petals. Also, record the number of extra petals and how many flowers of each type you have.
4. Multiply the number of flowers with extra petals x seven to get the approximate age of your meadow.
5. Send the results (number of flowers with extra petals), together with your name and address, and Ordnance Survey grid reference if known, to [glynislaws@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:glynislaws@hotmail.co.uk).

The results will appear in the autumn newsletter.

Glynis Laws

Ref: *How buttercups can teach you history* by Ken Thompson, Saturday 22 July 2017 *The Daily Telegraph*



cc-by-sa/2.0 - Creeping buttercup... by Evelyn Simak - [geograph.org.uk/p/5386705](http://geograph.org.uk/p/5386705)

## Managing Trellech Wet Meadow

As part of the Long Forest Project reported in the previous newsletter, Coleg Gwent students have been practising their hedge laying skills, under the guidance of their very experienced tutors, at Trellech Wet Meadow, the reserve MMG manage in partnership with Gwent Wildlife Trust. Most of the work has been taking place on the boundary with the Wye Valley Practice's car park in Trellech, and the picture shows the scene the afternoon children from Trellech Primary School came over to watch.

As well as this boundary, hedges have been improved around the site and MMG work parties have helped to clear up the cuttings.

A great deal of other work has been done on the fields over the winter too. After the fields were cut for haylage, Gwent Wildlife Trust and volunteers from Wye Valley AONB replaced sections of fencing in the woodland area, cut back brush and some of the wild areas, particularly around the pond, and brought in a roller to deal with the bracken.

MMG committee member Dick Coates, who has been coordinating the work by various

agencies on the field (and joining in with the work parties himself) has worked with GWT to prepare a plan for the next stages, which includes desilting the pond, improving the drinking area for grazing sheep, and planting some native tree species in an area currently overgrown.

Keith Allen put up more than 20 Dormouse tubes around the site last spring and in November he with the help of Dick, Steph and Phoebe Williams collected them all up. We were delighted to find Dormouse nests in four of the tubes and will be doing all we can to make sure these lovely, protected creatures are allowed to thrive.



Coleg Gwent students laying hedge between Wet Meadow & Trellech Surgery. Feb 2018  
Trellech School come to learn the ropes.

## Monmouthshire Botany Group

Monmouthshire Botany Group was established in 2013 and now has over 30 participants with between 10-20 attending field meetings.

The group provides an opportunity for both beginners and those with some botanical knowledge to improve their field ID skills and to record in some of the less well-covered squares for Atlas 2020.

Each month between April and September the group hold a Wildflower Walk. These start at 10 am continuing until about 3-4 pm. All days are for helping to improve ID skills and recording for Atlas 2020.

Anyone can join the group but booking is essential for the walks, as venues and times are subject

to change depending on the conditions, and you will be given the exact meeting point and full information nearer the date. The proposed 2018 programme is included in the Diary section of this newsletter. Contact Steph Tyler [steph\\_tyler2001@hotmail.com](mailto:steph_tyler2001@hotmail.com) for information about the group or to book a place on the walks. There is more detail about the group on the BSBI web site [www.bsbi.org/monmouthshire](http://www.bsbi.org/monmouthshire)

If you live across the border you may like to join the Herefordshire Botanical Society. They are also going strong and [have a new website](#), or contact their chairman Jean Wynne-Jones, 01531 660 670 or [jwynnejones@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jwynnejones@yahoo.co.uk)



## Dates for your Diary

Check our web site [www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk](http://www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk) for details, location maps and updates

**Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> April:** Our AGM and Spring Social at Llanishen – details in this newsletter

**Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> April:** the first Wildflower Walk of the year with Monmouthshire Botany Group\*, at Graig Syrffwd (Woodland)

**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> May: Monmouth Bee Festival**, organised by Bees for Development and Bee Friendly Monmouthshire to celebrate World Bee Awareness Day, with stalls and activities in the Nelson Garden in Monmouth, 10am to 4pm

**Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> May:** Wildflower Walk with Monmouthshire Botany Group\*, at Kilgwrrwg (wet grasslands)

**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> June:** An afternoon **Open Meadow at Blaentrophy Farm**, Grosmont, an SSSI, courtesy of the landowners and MMG members Ruaridh and Caroline MacDonald

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> June: Open Farm Sunday** at Gwent Wildlife Trust's **Pentwyn Farm Reserve** where the land is managed and grazed for wildlife and food, with Hereford cattle, Hebridean and Hill Radnor sheep and lambs. Includes a walk through the incredible wildflower meadows and a trail to neighbouring Cherry Orchard Farm to see their livestock. 11:00am – 4:00pm, no entrance fee. [Details on GWT web site](#)

**Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> June:** Wildflower Walk with Monmouthshire Botany Group\* at Pwll Du

**Friday 29<sup>th</sup> June:** Evening **Open Meadow** at Ty Major, Forest Coal Pit, near Abergavenny, home of Sheelagh Kerry and Peter Smith, from 4.30pm

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> July:** Wildflower Walk with Monmouthshire Botany Group\*, in Sirhowy valley - an attempt to re-find Sibthorpe

**Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> August:** Wildflower Walk with Monmouthshire Botany Group\*, in the Manmoel area

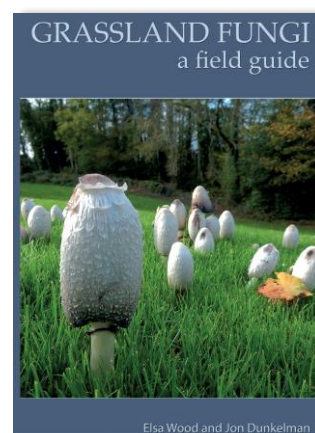
**Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> September:** Wildflower Walk with Monmouthshire Botany Group\*, at Peterstone Wentlooge

**\*Monmouthshire Botany Group:** booking is essential for these Wildflower Walks, details in this newsletter

**Gwent Wildlife Trust** run events throughout the year: [www.gwentwildlife.org/whats-on](http://www.gwentwildlife.org/whats-on)

### Grassland Fungi: A Field Guide

Published by Monmouthshire Meadows Group. Buy from [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) retail price £19.99. Also available at MMG events at a special price (£10 to members, £15 to non-members), but we are not able to post copies



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 Keep Wales Tidy; Sustainable Development Fund**, a **Natural Resources Wales** initiative in the **Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB); Gwent Wildlife Trust; Monmouthshire Natural Assets Project; Bee-friendly Monmouthshire; Raglan Community Council**



The following sponsors assisted with the purchase of Kingcoed Meadows: **Biffa Award, The Alan Evans Memorial Trust, The Banister Charitable Trust, Foyle Foundation, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Habitataid, Ricardo Crawley Trust, New Grove Trust and Waterloo Foundation.**

