

Monmouthshire Meadows

Issue 19

Registered Charity No. 1111345

Autumn 2013

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

Contents

From the Chair	1
MMG Autumn Meeting . .	3
The Noble Chafer	4
Pentwyn Meadows	5
Castle Meadows	6
Meadows Are More Than Flowers	7
New Members	8
Parish Grasslands Project	9
Dean Meadows Group . .	9
Meadows, a Book by George Peterken	9
Dates for your Diary	10

To Join Us

*Membership is the life blood of the Group. If you are not a member and would like to join, please contact Martin Suter on **01600 714577** or martinsuter@fmail.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

Spring and summer have, as ever, been busy for the committee. Much of the early spring was taken up by the editorial sub-committee producing the book to celebrate our 10th anniversary and then we had Open Days to organise and Shows to attend plus the usual round of visiting new members, giving advice, collecting yellow rattle seed, collecting good quality wild flower seed from Pentwyn meadow with the seed harvester thanks to Tim Green of Gwent Wildlife Trust, representing MMG at various meetings and helping some members with mowing using our Tracmaster.

Our anniversary book

This was published in May and has been available on our stalls and in some local shops over the summer. Most members will have collected their free copy by now, but anyone who hasn't can pick it up at our Autumn meeting or contact the committee. The Wye Valley AONB funded the book's production and we are very grateful for their support.

Surveys

Numerous field surveys and advisory visits were made to new members and these visits were followed by sending each member a plant list and management suggestions. Several visits were also made to 'old' members to see how things had progressed.



Fiona Williams sent us this beautiful picture of a Southern Marsh Orchid among buttercups and sorrel taken on her land at St Brides, Netherwent

There were some nice surprises with more than 30 Twayblades found in a small site near The Fedw belonging to Trystan & Hannah Davies, Sainfain and Broad-leaved Helleborine at Simon & Alex Dawson's land at Upper Cwrs near The Hendre, a beautiful clump of Southern Marsh Orchids on fields at Susan Harrington's Broom House near Raglan and on a small mini meadow on a lawn in Monmouth belonging to Cheryl Cummings, a Pyramidal Orchid, Twayblade and lots of Yellow Oat Grass. Maggie Biss and Sheelagh Kerry helped me out with some of the surveys.

Open Days in June

We had two open days on successive Sundays in June – thanks to those who opened their meadows – Ann Robinson, the Gooches at Parson's Grove, Jessica King and Shirenewton & Mynyddbach fields association in the Shirenewton area; Sister Jillian and Martin Suter at Tymawr Convent, Nicky at Four Acres Maryland, Pam Lloyd and GWT at New Grove and Barbara and Terence Newby on Lydart Hill. Many volunteers manned the sites and showed visitors around and following the Shirenewton Open Day we launched our book and provided refreshments for those who came.

Shows

The season started with our stall at the Gwent Wildlife Trust 50th anniversary open day on 6 August, where the summer sun brought in the crowds to the wonderful gardens of Dingestow Court where their

head office is located. At Monmouth Show in late August we had a great spot in the Countryside Tent and recruited eight new members as well as selling wildflower seed and Ray Armstrong's lovely cards! We also on 14 September attended Usk Show where CPRW had invited us to share their tent. There we again chatted to 'old' members as well as making contact with some 'new' people. For example, Fiona Williams from St Brides Netherwent told me of her interesting fields and later sent me photos of some of the Spotted and Southern Marsh Orchids she had seen there in June (our front page photo).

Marilyn and Jon Dunkelman both helped me set up at these events and they also manned the stands for many hours – other people who did a stint on the stands included Cecilia Davies, Nick Hoyal, Judith Carruthers, Sheelagh Kerry and Jill Featherstone. Ian Draycott & Ruth Allen did a stint too and at the end of the day took the stand down at Monmouth. Thanks to all of these.

Meetings and training

Maggie Biss and I went to a meeting in Usk to hear how Monmouthshire County Council were thinking of letting local community groups adopt areas of grassland on MCC land from road verges to other amenity grassland to develop meadows for flowers and bees or to grow vegetables. Sheelagh Kerry has been helping the Castle Meadows Group in Abergavenny with a management plan and teaching them plant identification. I spent a day with

Countryside staff from Monmouthshire County Council teaching them plants, especially meadow and roadside verge plants. Routine involvements have been with Gwent Wildlife Trust and other bodies to confirm new Local Wildlife Sites and to discuss applications for Natural Assets funding.

Grass cutting

Many members were able to have their fields cut by local contractors on our Contractors List. Some new members showed huge commitment and following advice about the need to cut and rake of grass, they hand-scythed, in the hot July and August weather, large areas of steep



Our stall at the Monmouth Show (Jon Dunkelman)

grassland in their care – I take my hat off in particular to Tim and Julie Moss in the Angidy Valley and to Jonathan and Karen Wren in the Whitebrook valley for all their hard work (photos below). Other members including Annie Gorton-Harding at Kingcoed and Andy Pullen at Whitelye enterprisingly ‘accosted’ farmers that they saw nearby on tractors and persuaded them to cut their fields. Lindsay Tyler and Bill Howard also helped a number of members at Whitelye, Wolvesnewton, Devauden, Kingcoed and Beacon Hill by cutting their grassland areas with the MMG’s Tracmaster. Lindsay mowed the new meadow at the Babington Centre at Trellech where we scattered some Yellow Rattle seed.

The Exmoor Ponies

Last but not least we should mention that the two Exmoors, Jacinth and Jemima, spent many weeks during the spring and summer at the Pannett’s large field near Tintern eating down some of the abundant



Julie Moss on the huge pile she and husband Tim scythed and raked off their land at Hale End Cottage at Angidy, Tintern



Two pictures from Jonathan and Karen Wren showing the results of hand-scything and raking their field in Whitebrook valley

MMG Autumn Meeting Wednesday 30th October

The Priory, Monmouth – 7pm

Join us for an evening of meadows and meeting like-minded people. Speakers will be

- Anne Wareham on the Veddw garden mini meadows
- Abergavenny Community Orchard
- Local botanist Elsa Wood on autumn meadow fungi

There will be a home-made buffet supper, and plenty of chance to meet and chat to fellow members.

£12.50 per person including a glass of wine. Non-members are welcome at £15 each.

It is helpful to know numbers in advance so please contact Maggie Biss or book a place via our web site

grass and we are very grateful to Jane and her husband Tony for the great care that they took of them whilst with them. In September we took them to the Tymawr Convent wet meadow where some members had helped clear brambles and scrub last winter and then they moved on to Sarah Cheese’s pasture in Whitebrook. There is a waiting list for their use by other members in Penylan, Whitelye, St Maughans and Five Lanes plus the Virtuous Well at Trellech before they can return to the Pannetts at Tintern.

The Noble Chafer, *Gnorimus nobilis*

Sheelagh Kerry

The noble chafer is one of the UK's rarest beetles and a specialist of traditional orchards. It is an iridescent metallic bronzy green beetle approximately 2cm long whose larvae feed on decaying wood in the hollow trunks and branches of live fruit trees. The adult beetles emerge on hot sunny days in late June and July and live for only 4 to 6 weeks. They can sometimes be seen on hogweed, meadow sweet and elder flowers. The females lay up to 35 eggs beneath the bark or in the centre of the trunk of old decaying fruit tree. The eggs hatch 2 weeks later and the white, c-shaped larvae grow to about 3cm long and remain feeding within the tree for 2 to 3 years before they pupate.

Traditional orchards with trees 50 to 80 years old (particularly cherry, plum and apple) are the essential habitat for the noble chafer. The main strong



Adult noble chafer beetle

hold for the species is Worcestershire, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire, but Monmouthshire has not been looked to any great extent so they may be out there to find! There are no modern records of them using any wild growing trees of any species, all are in orchards with old decaying trees. Old orchards have no legal protection and continue to be destroyed.

Surveying for the noble chafer involves looking for the characteristic droppings or frass of the larvae which accumulates in hollow branches and trunks. The adult beetle is rarely seen and on wet years (like 2012) may even emerge and remain inside the tree to mate and lay eggs. The frass look like coffee granules or very fine gravel, it is 2 to 3mm long and lozenge shaped. Tree hollow should only be investigated if you are sure no one else is at home (eg. birds, bats or hornets!).

The sympathetic management of orchards for noble chafers (and other wildlife) should include sensitive pruning and leaving the thick older branches, leaving fallen trees and these can also be used, clear scrub from around the trees to allow sunlight on to the trunks (they seem to prefer trees in the open) and generally keep to an organic management regime.

Old orchards are often associated with old meadows and if any Monmouthshire Meadow Group members have fruit trees which may be suitable and are willing for someone to take a look please let me know.



Noble chafer beetle larvae and frass

Information from People's Trust for Endangered Species and Worcestershire Wildlife Trust.

Links:

www.ptes.org

www.wbrc.org.uk

The Pentwyn Meadows Project

Annette Murray, Gwent Wildlife Trust

Those familiar with Gwent Wildlife Trust's Pentwyn Farm reserve will know it is famed for its wildflower rich hay meadows, abundant with orchids and colourful wildflowers and teeming with butterflies. Sadly, Wales has seen a dramatic decline in these species rich grasslands in recent decades owing primarily to habitat loss and intensification of agriculture.

The Pentwyn Meadows Project aims to extend and enhance this valuable habitat at Pentwyn Farm. The Project is funded by Biffa Award, a multi-million pound fund which awards grants to community and environmental projects across the UK (www.biffa-award.org). The Project's main focus is not directly on the meadows themselves, but on the hedgerows and field margins that border them.



These boundary features have nature conservation value in themselves. At Pentwyn the hedgerows are composed of a variety of species such as hazel, field maple, hawthorn and blackthorn. They provide plentiful food for a variety of birds and mammals as well as valuable nectar sources for insects. These important wildlife corridors are also ideal habitat for the endangered dormice. At the base of the hedge, un-cut field margins provide further cover for wildlife including small mammals and reptiles.

However, if left unmanaged, field boundaries can present a threat to species rich grassland. Tall, unmanaged hedgerows may cast shade over grassland preventing wild flowers from blooming. Overgrown hedges can also restrict access by machinery for cutting. This allows scrub species such as blackthorn, bramble and bracken to encroach onto the meadows. Small field systems, such as those at Pentwyn Farm, are highly vulnerable to scrub invasion in this way. This is why routine management of field boundaries and margins is so important.



Management of meadow margins

As hedges grow, they gradually form gaps lower down the hedge as the stems become more tree-like. At this stage the hedge needs to be managed to restore bushy re-growth. This can be done through laying or coppicing the hedge.

Hedge-laying rejuvenates the hedge by partially cutting stems and bending them at an angle. Traditionally these pleachers were weaved together providing a stock proof barrier to protect the hedge that regrows from the base of the cut.

Coppicing a hedge by cutting it down to base level and allowing it to regrow restores the hedge when it is too thick to lay. This may be done in conjunction with planting new hedge trees in any gaps. It is important to protect hedges from browsing animals with suitable stock proof fencing which should still allow access for maintenance through cutting.

Regular cutting or trimming helps maintain the density of the hedge and prevent it from becoming “leggy”. Cutting should be done rotationally, ideally every 3 years, alternating between the sides and top of the hedge where practical. This ensures a continuous supply of food for wildlife. Cutting field margins at the base of the hedge should also be done rotationally. As a suggested guide, each field edge should be cut a minimum of once every three years,

always ensuring there is some continuity of unmanaged field margin in each meadow.

All these management techniques can be seen at Pentwyn Farm which is open to the public year round. For further information on the Pentwyn Meadows Project please see:

www.gwentwildlife.org/what-we-do/projects/pentwyn-meadows-project

or contact: amurray@gwentwildlife.org

Castle Meadows, Abergavenny

Sheelagh Kerry

Castle Meadows are 20 hectares of flat, grazing land beside the River Usk, overlooked by Abergavenny Castle and adjacent to Linda Vista Gardens, the Byfield Lane Carpark and also the Abergavenny Community Orchard. The site is owned and managed by Monmouthshire County Council. In August 2011 a Friends of Castle Meadows Group was set up in response to the need to have continued and regular control of invasive plant species which are becoming established on the Meadows. These are Giant Hogweed (the Friends identify the location of the plants and then MCC spray them), Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam (controlled by hand pulling during the early summer).

The Friends are also gathering information on the plants and animals present on the Meadows. To help with this Monmouthshire Meadows Group and some of the Friends have carried out a plant survey this summer. It was found that Hay Rattle is much more widespread than in previous years, Pignut and Knapweed were recorded and one spike of a Common Spotted Orchid was seen. The management of the grassland has been a hay cut in the early



summer followed by autumn/winter grazing by cattle (usually cows and calves which soon seem to get used to all the dogs using the area!). This management does seem to have increased the botanical diversity of the Meadows, along with the creation of wetter areas by building dams to hold the water back.

The surveys will continue next year and the management plan will be updated.

Sheelagh Kerry



Meadows Are More Than Flowers

Ian Rabjohns, Chair of Monmouthshire Bat Group

When my wife and I took on a property near Penallt with several small meadows it started a voyage of discovery that is still en route. Working on a basis of remnant old orchard and a few sheep to act as mowers, we have moved gradually to a far greater understanding of what meadows or unimproved grassland really supports.

We all cannot but be amazed at the riot of flowers, both cultivated and wild, that this past summer has given us and I am sure many of you with meadows have found time to wander through your field marvelling at the new this or that growing up among the grasses that you have not seen before.

Hopefully you have also been able to say we have far more butterflies that we have seen for a few years, at least for the later species; the early part of the year was a disaster. You cannot have missed the vast numbers of bumble bees working this year and hopefully were aware in mid-August of the large numbers of these that were failing to return to nests and were dozing the night away in nectar rich flowers.

Fewer of you would have ventured out at dusk or dark to see what your meadows had to offer then. Don't be in doubt that the activity stops when the sun goes down, if anything it becomes more intense. A huge surge in moth activity began when the warm weather arrived at the beginning of July to join the already active cohort of beetles and other insects.

This feast of invertebrates was what the bat population was waiting for. Births of young at the maternity roosts had been delayed by at least three weeks over 'normal' dates, and this bonanza was vital in order to enable young to reach maturity and start to put on weight before hibernation time.

Unimproved and rough grassland is vital for a number of bat species which rely on the rich source of insects that it supports. Some, like the two species of pipistrelle commonly occurring, the large serotine bat and the lesser horseshoe,

will all spend time feeding over and along the margins of our small hedge enclosed meadows. Even without going out at night some of you will be able to check out bat activity on your patch by searching porches, log sheds or out-buildings to look for a bat feeding perch where bats that have caught insects will persistently hang up to eat what is wanted and drop the rest.

It is these remnants that will tell you what insects are being eaten. Most common will be the wing cases of the red soldier beetle, picked from the heads of umbelliferous plants such as cow parsley or hogweed; lesser horseshoe bats go for these. Later in summer comes the feast of yellow-underwing and silver y moths. These are usually the target of the long eared bats which feed by gleaning the moths from vegetation and flowers; their four centimetre long ears can pick up the slight rustling sounds made by the moths which it then takes to its feeding perch. The result is a happy bat and a carpet of moth wings on the floor.

The picture shows one such perch with mostly large yellow underwings, some silver y and also a lesser broad bordered yellow underwing and a few beetle elytra.



Discarded moth wings below a brown long-eared bat feeding perch



A maternity group of Brown long-eared bats in a bat box by one of our member's meadows

Long eared bats have been the subject of some discussion and research lately. The widely distributed brown long-eared bat is the most common, but the rare grey long-eared occurs at a few sites on the south coast of England, particularly Isle of Wight and Purbeck.

A research student at Bristol University, Orly Razgour, has done climate and habitat modelling and has concluded that two areas of South Wales are also suitable for the species; south Pembroke and to a lesser extent the lower Wye Valley. The Pembroke area has already produced a grey long-eared roost found through DNA testing droppings. You never know, your meadows may be supporting one of the UK's rarest bats!

Ian Rabjohns

Welcome to our New Members

A successful summer for the group has resulted in a host of new members since the last newsletter. We'd like to welcome them all:

Paul Barrows, Raglan
 Mark Edwards-Jones, St Briavels
 Paul and Zena Gordon, St Briavels Common
 Fiona Harling, The Narth
 David Hathaway, Llanishen
 William Paul Jones, Aberbargoed, Mid Glam
 Lorna McGlynn, Llanellen
 Tim and Julie Moss, Tintern
 Diane Parker, Tintern
 Ruth Routh, Catbrook
 Andy Shipp, Abergavenny
 Edward Spuffard, Magor
 Christine Trow and Paul McKendrick, Llanishen

Trystan and Hannah Davies, Devauden
 Timothy Fewell, Cliffords Mesne, Newent
 Penny Gorton, Chepstow
 Sue Harrington, Raglan
 Jadwiga Howell, Llanfihangel-Tor-y-Mynydd
 Justin Lane, Llangarron, Ross on Wye
 Virginia Morgan, Walford, Ross on Wye
 Jules Newman, Rhayader
 Lynn Price, Gosmont
 David Scouller, Llanishen
 Peter Spencer Smith, Llanfetherine
 Patrick Thody, Whitebrook
 Jonathan & Karen Wren, Ross-on-Wye

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

All new members should have received our book *Wildflower Meadows in Monmouthshire*. Let us know if you have not yet had your free copy, or pick yours up at our Autumn meeting on 30th October.

Martin Suter, Membership secretary
 martinsuter@fmail.co.uk

Parish Grasslands Project WATER Mini-symposium

Mackenzie Hall, Brockweir
Saturday 19 October, 2.00 - 5.30 p.m.

Following recent successful autumn meetings on sheep and wood, the Parish Grasslands Project is holding another, this time on the theme of water. The meeting will take the form of a series of short talks and demonstrations, with associated exhibits, and refreshments during the discussion intervals.

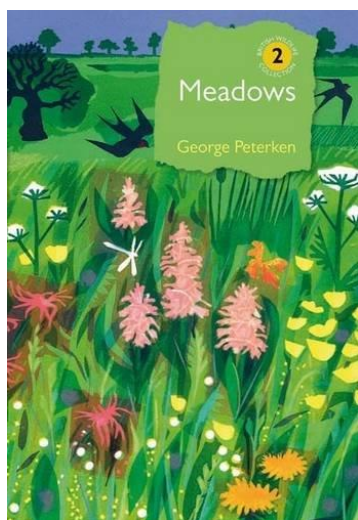
Water is a vital resource, the very stuff of life, but many of us take it for granted. Local speakers will highlight a variety of aspects, from local geology and hydrology to local domestic hydroelectric generation, grey water systems, the folklore and history of wells and watercourses, and a speaker from the Wildlife Trust will talk about life in local ponds and rivers. We will also have a demonstration by a professional dowser.

The meeting will be open to all. Non-members of the PGP will be asked for a small contribution towards costs.

George Peterken

Meadows

A new book by George Peterken



George Peterken, well known ecologist and until recently Chairman of the Parish Grasslands Project, has recently published his book *Meadows* (number 2 in the British Wildlife Collection).

It is currently available from booksellers or direct from the publisher British Wildlife

Publishing.

George will be talking about this book, and the historical, biological and conservation aspects he found most interesting, at a meeting of Dean Meadows Group on 25th October.

News from Dean Meadows Group Derek Frost

Dean Meadows Group had a busy second year with some new approaches as well as some that our members have enjoyed before.

In roughly chronological order these were:

- Our spring meeting in Bream with a talk by Rob Jarman on the story of meadows over time and the physical and natural landscape they fit into. He talked about the geology of the Severn basin and the more recent land usage evident in his own meadows.
- Three of our members in Tidenham opened on the same day and about 30 attended in good weather.
- On a damp afternoon in August we had our stall at Bream Gardening Show but still had some good conversations and made new contacts.



Dean Meadows Group stall at Bream Gardening Show

- From a member's suggestion we produced a leaflet on how gardeners can encourage a wildflower patch and we have given out over 200. This is downloadable from deanmeadows.org.uk.
- We opened four meadows in Flaxley and Pope's Hill from a base in Flaxley Village Hall with guided walks by the owners, again about 30 people came along.
- We arranged three visits to members' properties with some of the committee being present to show our faces and chat about anything at all.
- Chris Parsons welcomed members to demonstrations of sickle-bar mowing and raking and composting.

Continued/-

Dean Meadows Group continued

- Chris has also had a sickle-bar mower on trial for members to borrow under supervision; this has maintenance costs but may be a good option for smaller meadows.
- Our botanists completed 20 surveys

- Our Autumn meeting on Friday October 25th in Westbury on Severn Parish Hall is a talk by George Peterken about his new book "Meadows" which is the second in the British Wildlife Collection. George will speak about the historical, biological and conservation aspects he found most interesting.

Dates for your Diary

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

Friday 18th October: *A Practical 'Hands on' Sheep Course*, organised by Gwent Wildlife Trust, with local vet Hilary Jones at Pentwyn Farm. Booking is essential, through GWT please. Details on their web site www.gwentwildlife.org/whats-on

Saturday 19th October: *Parish Grasslands Project Autumn Meeting, 'Water'*, at Mackenzie Hall, Brockweir, 2pm start. The geology and history behind natural water courses, and how we and other animals need, find and use it

Friday 25th October: George Peterken talks about his new book *Meadows* at a meeting of *Dean Meadows Group* in Westbury Parish Hall, Westbury on Severn. The evening is free for members of Dean Meadows Group, £5 for non-members. Doors open 7pm for 7.30pm start

Sunday 27th October: *Community and Environment Show* in Abergavenny. Meet the people caring for Castle Meadows

Wednesday 30th October: MMG Autumn Meeting at The Priory, Monmouth. 7pm start. Details elsewhere in this newsletter

Tuesday 5th November: Gwent Wildlife Trust *Conservation Grazing Seminar* at Pentwyn Farm. 10am start. For information contact Andy Beadsworth on abeadsworth@gwentwildlife.org or 01600 740600. Booking through GWT please. Details on their web site www.gwentwildlife.org/whats-on

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 -

Wildflower Meadows in Monmouthshire

Ten years of conserving and restoring flower-rich grasslands



Monmouthshire Meadows Group

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.

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

Our book project has been supported by the **Sustainable Development Fund**, a **Natural Resources Wales** initiative in the **Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**

