Monmouthshire Meadows

Issue 25 Registered Charity No. 1111345 Autumn 2016

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

If you are not a member and would like to join contact Cecilia Davies on **01281 681222** or

cecilia691222@gmail.com
or use our online membership form

For general information please contact Sheelagh Kerry on **01873 890598** or

smk@smithecology.co.uk

Contact details of our Committee, as well as news, events and members' notices, are on our web site

www.monmouth shire meadows.org.uk

Follow us on Twitter

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Contributions to the newsletter or items for the web site can be sent to Marilyn Dunkelman

marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk

From the Chair Stephanie Tyler

It has been another busy spring and summer this year trying to fit in visits to as many new members as possible and re-visit a few. My apologies if you are one of the few who has not yet had a visit from me, Sheelagh Kerry or Elsa Wood. You will be priority for spring 2017.

We managed to survey 24 sites throughout Monmouthshire and some in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire and saw some wonderful sites in the Onen/Talycoed area, at Pen y van near The Narth, at Gwehelog and at Henllys as well as in the Black Mountains. Other fields elsewhere including ones at Llanvair Cross, Bettws Newydd, Wernreolydd, Llanbadoc and Devauden had some existing interest and great potential and the owners are keen to make them more flower-rich. Garden mini-meadows continue to increase in number and provide oases for wildlife – see Ray Armstrong's update on his garden meadow in this newsletter.

Elsewhere in this issue Marilyn Dunkelman reports on 'firsts' for members' patches. It is always exciting when new species appear whether it is an orchid, a harebell or any other species. Do let us know what you find on your patch.

A possible new venture is taking on a 10-year lease of a wonderful 24 acres of dry and wet grassland at Trellech. We await terms from Gwent County Council and may enter into an agreement jointly with Gwent Wildlife Trust to manage the land. My thanks to Trellech resident Dick Coates for alerting us to the tenancy and for all his help dealing with the Council and arranging to have the hay cut.



Before the party: waiting for our guests at Kingcoed on 17 June

Glynis Laws created a membership survey questionnaire to which many of you responded. A summary is in this newsletter but her full report will be on the website. Many thanks Glynis.

Unfortunately our Tracmaster (allen scythe) suffered a broken prop shaft when Lindsay was mowing one small meadow and was out of action throughout August but it is now mended. Thanks to Ian Rabjohn loaning his machine we did manage to cut one meadow. Ed Rogers kindly took some machinery that had been stored in his barn and that we no longer wanted to a sale and let us have the proceeds.

A photographer from BBC Countryfile magazine visited in June and took shots of members among the many Southern Marsh and Spotted Orchids at our Kingcoed Meadows and then returned in the autumn for shots of mowing and raking.



Otherwise our main events were the evening event on 17 June for donors to the Kingcoed appeal.

Thankfully we managed to avoid the heavy rain that fell elsewhere and visitors had a pleasant evening with drinks and snacks and a guided walk around the meadows at their best. Then on 2 July the Kingcoed meadows were open to the public for National Meadows Day, hosted by MMG and Plantlife. The few visitors who ventured out in the afternoon to see Joanna Kerr's wonderful garden and the meadow created by her and her neighbour, Steve Roberts, and have tea and cakes had a real treat but unfortunately the date clashed with many other events including Andy Murray playing at Wimbledon so numbers were low! My thanks go to Joanna and Steve for hosting us and in particular to Cecilia Davies for helping organise

Edgar Biss

It was with great sadness that we heard about the sudden death of Maggie Biss's husband Edgar during August. Most of you will know Maggie Biss and what a huge part she has played in the life of MMG. She was a founding member and MMG Secretary for 13 years until 2015. We offer her our sincere condolences and wish her well for the future

the event and to all who made cakes and/or helped with the teas.

We attended Garden Open Days at Rockfield Park and Clytha House and shows at Chepstow and Usk and thank Phil Powell of Gwent Energy for hosting us at the shows and also thank Judith Carruthers, Cecilia

Davies, Martin Fenn-Smith, Dick Coates and of course Marilyn and Jon Dunkelman for putting up and talking down the MMG stand and for manning it during the days. A further event at the Woodland Trust's Cefn Ila is still to come.

Finally I would like to thank my brother-in-law Derek Tyler and my husband for all their efforts in erecting the splendid display boards at Kingcoed and also at Ida's Meadow at Maryland which MMG now owns. It was no mean feat digging in the heavy oak supports.

Steph Tyler



MMG Autumn Get-together

Thursday 27th October at the Centenary Hall (Scout Hut), Usk



Autumn meadow (Jon Dunkelman)

Two of our members, David Sheers and Malcolm Schuyl, will be talking about their meadows experiences, followed by our buffet supper and social evening.

David is a committee member of the Monmouthshire Branch of the Council for the Protection of Rural Wales. He and his wife have a small oasis of species-rich pastures and meadows in a sea of intensive agriculture, at Llandewi Rhydderch near Abergavenny.

Malcolm is a professional photographer, and a keen moth-trapper. He came to live at Maypole near St Maughans three years ago and have a small farm with species-rich pastures, woodland and a stream.

Start time is 7 pm, with supper served after the speakers.

Costs include refreshments and a glass of wine or you can come to the meeting only

Members: £14.00 each

Non-members: £17.00 each

Meeting only: £3.50 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 (where you will find directions and further information) or contact Marilyn Dunkelman: telephone 01600 860031, or email marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk

Baling Hay - the Low Carbon Option

Members David and Stella Collard sent these pictures of their homemade wooden baler. They told us: "We made it because a traditional baler seems to be unstable on our steep land. We bring the hay up to our barn in a trailer and then make our bales at 'leisure' in the dry. The baler is a simple wooden box with a removable front clipped on with four

sturdy hooks-and-eyes. There are four cup hooks at the bottom for attaching the strawcord.

"The hay is pounded into the box then tied off. The tricky bit is getting the cord to stay on the hooks and then releasing it when you need to. Some trial and error is required! It's a bit slow but we have made 36 bales this season, enough for our small flock over the winter. Our record for a bale is four and a half minutes. It helps to have a grandson available."

We are very impressed.





AGM Report

Committee Changes

At April's AGM we said thank you to five retiring committee members who have all contributed a huge amount to MMG's work over the last few years.

Glynis Law, although no longer on the committee, continues to be an active member of the group. Martin Fenn-Smith and Martin Suter retired from their roles as Treasurer and Membership Secretary respectively, and two of our longest serving members, Ann Robinson and Maggie Biss also stood down after years of active support and commitment.

Maggie was with Diana Bevan, a founder member of MMG and has been our secretary since the Group was formed. She has been a key person especially during the early years when she lived at Pilstone House and has loyally supported our Open Days and other events and for many years produced MMG's newsletter.

Ann Robinson has also been a loyal supporter of the Group. She instigated the production of MMG's anniversary book and hosted the launch of this book at her lovely meadows near Shirenewton.

In their place we have gained some new members. Cecilia Davies, who has served on the committee for a year now, is our new membership secretary; she stood in for three months as Treasurer, preparing the accounts for the AGM. Rachel Morgan is a new recruit and she takes over as treasurer. Judith Carruthers has also officially joined the team after being a frequent volunteer helper at our events.

Grassland Fungi of the Wye Valley

Elsa Wood and Jon Dunkelman gave the presentation at the AGM, with Jon explaining the



Maggie and Ann at the 2013 launch of our book
Wildflower Meadows in Monmouthshire

project to produce a book to aid identification of local grassland fungi, and Elsa talking about some of the fungi that will be featured. The photographs were all taken by the team, which also includes Malcolm Schuyl and Keith Moseley and Marilyn Dunkelman. The project continues this year with an aim to publish in 2017.



It's behind you! (Jon on fungi safari, picture by Elsa)

Volunteers Welcome

With a few of our long standing committee members now retired we are looking for more people to work with the us and hopefully join the committee. If you have some spare time we would love to hear from you. You don't need to be an expert, just willing to help with something, from paperwork to field work, catering for meetings or manning stalls. Contact Steph Tyler to find out more.

National Meadows Day 2nd July 2016

To celebrate National Meadows Day and the completion of our long and successful campaign to purchase our own land, our open meadows day this year featured Kingcoed Meadows where we were joined by Plantlife Cymru. Seventy people visited the site, and Plantlife organised professional photographer Nigel Pugh to cover the launch of their new leaflet about Welsh Meadows. Nigel took the lovely photographs on this page and we are grateful to him for allowing us to use them.

We had guided walks throughout the day, led by Steph; Linda Smout, who lives close by and knows the meadows well; Rachel Morgan, the previous owner; and Helen Bradley, Plantlife's Outreach Officer.

With the final amount of money raised for Kingcoed we have installed a display board on the field, and produced a leaflet to help visitors find their way to and around the fields. There is a digital version on our web site if you haven't seen the paper version, as well as our current species list for the site which many people requested on the day. (Look for the page headed Kingcoed Meadows Open Day and Species List.)

Plantlife also produce the wildlife spotter and meadow activities sheets for children that we were giving out on the day and featured on our stall at other events. These cover a selection of flowers, grasses, fungi, butterflies and other wildlife (and are available to download from the Wild About Plants web site www.wildaboutplants.org.uk).

In the afternoon Joanna Kerr opened her garden at Glebe House, Llanfair Kilgeddin, and the meadow created by her and her neighbour, Steve Roberts. Visitor numbers were not as good, as most people who visited Kingcoed in the morning were heading home to watch tennis at Wimbledon or to another of the many events around the area on that day.



Kingcoed
Meadows on
National Meadows
Day, with thanks
to Nigel Pugh and
Plantlife Cymru



First Sightings

If you have any pictures of first sightings in your meadow, send them in to marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk

It has been a good summer for 'firsts' this year and many members have sent in news and pictures for this section. Sue Weston found her first orchids while pulling thistles at Mill House Farm, and Andy Williams in Devauden and Tom and Kate Pitts-Tucker in St Maughans also saw their first Common Spotted-orchids on their land. Ann Robinson at Shirenewton and David Emerson near Ross-on-

Wye saw the appearance of Green-winged Orchids, a nationally threatened species and very good news to see them on new sites.

Tim and Julie Moss in the Angidy Valley found two Early Purple Orchids in their field, where a Natural Assets grant had

enabled them to install fencing and bring in ponies to graze. Tim reports that it made all the wheelbarrow loads of pony pooh collection worthwhile.

Annie Gorton
Harding in Kingcoed had
the first sightings of
Southern Marsh-orchids as
well as the reappearance of
the Butterfly Orchid that
flowered last year.











Welcome to our New Members

We are delighted to welcome the following new members:

Jan and Barbara Adam, Newport; Brian Bocking, St Briavels; Clarinda Collin, Llandewi Skirrid; Miranda Cooke, Hereford; Eifion Davies, Ystradfellte, Aberdare; Karl Daymond, Chepstow; Charlotte Fleming, Llanbadoc; Arthur Harris, Llandenny; Barbara Jackson, Wernrheolydd; Margaret Kelly, Welsh Newton; Larry Stoter and Pamela Manfield, The Narth; George Peterken, St Briavels Common; Brian Powell, Trellech; Lucy Pritchard, Betts Newydd; Derek Sanderson, Trellech; Hamish Sandison, Llanlowell; Jane Smith-Haddon, Shirenewton; Eifion Thomas, Chepstow; Theresa Tromans and Matthew LLoyd, The Narth

Cecilia Davies, Membership secretary

Pastures New Revisited Ray Armstrong

Following our move from Beacon Hill to Penallt in 2015 and further to advice from the Monmouthshire Meadows Group we decided to facilitate the regeneration of a 600 square metre patch of what transpired to be unimproved grassland in our garden. The area encompasses a steep, well drained, south/south east facing slope that benefits from the warmth of the sun. Eighteen months later it still continues to surprise us with the increase in the wild flowers and the number of resident and visiting wildlife.

There has been a significant increase in the Barren Strawberry, Ragwort, Germander Speedwell and Common-spotted Orchid but the largest increase is in the Yellow Rattle, last year there were only three plants, this year there was at least forty. Yellow Rattle is a semi-parasite that seems to thrive in barer areas, the roots attaching to any grass roots nearby so as well

as producing flowers that are attractive to bees they help to suppress the growth of the grass to the advantage of other grassland flowers. When the flowers have finished the seed boxes really do 'rattle' hence its name, in past times this was taken as a signal the hay was ready to cut. Three more flowering plants have appeared namely Common Twayblade, Creeping Jenny and Eyebright.

We have had regular visits from a dog fox and early autumn last year he actually had a quiet snooze on the warm bank in the late sunshine. Earlier this year we had an overnight visit from a badger, which dug up about 20 square metres on the top of the bank in pursuit of pignut and we have had random visits by a hedgehog as we have seen its 'calling cards'. I would add that badgers predate hedgehogs and I consider their increase in numbers nationally is one of the reasons for the hedgehog decline, so fingers crossed.



MMG members helping Ray and Beccy Armstrong cut their meadow



Brown-footed Leafcutter Bee



Red Fox



Green Woodpecker anting

There have also been regular visits by squirrels and rabbits. Throughout late spring and summer we have been visited by a pair of Green Woodpeckers feeding on the increasing number of Yellow Meadow Ant nests and they also brought their young onto the bank to feed. We have witnessed Blackbirds and Starlings 'anting' and carrying out gymnastics on the ant nests and seeing regular visits by Goldfinches and Greenfinches feeding on the grass and knapweed seeds.

The variety of grasses and wild flowers present has proved to be a magnet for a myriad of insects which I have continued to monitor and to date have identified nearly forty species of bees including eight bumble bee species, three species of leafcutter bees, a mason bee, a Hairy-footed Flower Bee and a number of *Andrena, Nomada* and *Sphecodes* solitary bees, several of which I understand are quite scarce in Wales. I have also identified the beautiful 'jewel-eyed' Splayed Deerfly *Chrysops caecutiens*, a sawfly *Tethredo arcuata* a lover of flower rich meadows, a number of hoverflies

All photographs by Ray Armstrong



Six-spot Burnet Moths on Knapweed



Parasitoid fly Sicus ferrugineus on Ox-eye

including the nimble, fast flying Thick-legged Hoverfly *Syritta pipiens* and a reddish brown fly *Sicus ferrugineus* a parasitoid of various species of bumblebees. We have had large numbers of Six-spot Burnet moths feeding on the knapweed and also a day flying micro- moth Knapweed Conch *Agapeta zoegana* that feeds on knapweed seeds.

In early spring we had the welcome sight of the dancing flight of a male Orange — tip butterfly



Brown-footed Leafcutter Bee



Splayed Deerfly on Ox-eye Daisy



Thick-legged Hoverfly on Ox-eye Daisy

wandering the grassland looking for a female. Throughout the spring and summer we have had the following resident grassland butterflies Common Blue, Meadow Brown, Ringlet, Small Skipper, Large Skipper, Small Copper, Marbled White, Gatekeeper together with a number of other butterflies namely, Small Tortoiseshell, the migratory Painted Lady, Peacock, Brimstone, Large White, Small White, Red Admiral and Speckled Wood in the garden.

Once again the rich diversity of wildlife present in this mini-meadow emphasizes how important the

wild flower meadows are to our indigenous wildlife. Over the last century up to 97% of Britain's wildflower meadows have been lost due to modern farming techniques; and as anyone who has ever wandered through a wild flower meadow will know, their loss is a tragedy. Whether large or small areas, they are a vital part of our countryside legacy and everything possible must be done to protect, maintain and where possible, restore them, we all have a part to play.

Itton Common Managing Verges for Wildflowers

As members will know, MMG have long supported Plantlife's campaign for road verges to be managed to encourage wildflowers rather than having them constantly cut back. Recently the County Council has been planting roundabouts and other areas with annual flowers, which look lovely in an urban setting. However, in more rural areas we believe that the native grassland is of far more conservation value and if managed appropriately would soon develop a diversity of species which would be of greater benefit to wildlife than planting with more exotic annuals.

At Itton Common, near Devauden, residents have decided they would prefer proper meadows rather than annual plantings, or the twice-monthly cut that was done in the past, and they approached MMG for advice. Steph Tyler surveyed the area in early June, and found there is a wide strip of verge in the village which has all the indicator species needed for a Local Wildlife Site*! Other parts of the village, including the village green, are less rich now, but

with a bit of encouragement have the potential to become species-rich and develop a beautiful spring display of local native wildflowers.

Steph advised a cut after mid-July with removal of the cut material and then a cut again in late autumn with removal of cut grass, and definitely no fertiliser. The residents are working with Devauden Community Council and are in contact with the County Council with the intention this management regime instated. We wish them every success.

*Indicator species found on the Itton verge were Knapweed, Cat's Ear, Ox-eye Daisy, Bird's-foot-trefoil, Imperforate St John's Wort, Field Woodrush, Autumn Hawkbit, Barren Strawberry, Red Clover and Cowslips.



Ox-eye Daisy (Keith Moseley)

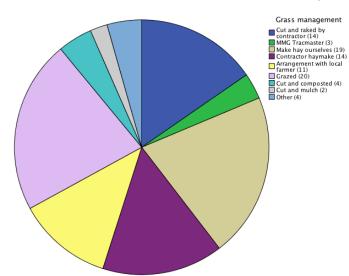
Apple Day at Cefn Ila

The Woodland Trust are holding an Apple Day event at their Cefn Ila reserve near Usk on Sunday 23rd October. There will be free shuttle busses running from Usk car park all day. Lots of activities are planned, with apple pressing, camp fires, music, stands and exhibitions, a treasure hunt, guided walks with species experts, and plenty of food and drink to keep you going. It is also a fascinating reserve and well worth a visit in its own right.

Membership survey Glynis Laws

Earlier this year, we decided to undertake a short membership survey as a simple way of giving members the opportunity to describe problems they might have with the management of their meadows, particularly those with whom we have no regular contact beyond the initial botanical survey and advice. The survey was carried out using SurveyMonkey, an on-line service. Nearly 40% of the 238 members invited to complete the survey responded. We cannot be sure how representative they are of the full membership but here is a brief summary of the results.

Most members' meadows (67%) are up to 5 acres with about half the others being of greater acreage. The remaining members manage meadow areas within their gardens, illustrating current trends in garden design and interest in gardening for wildlife. Nearly everyone had managed to follow MMG advice to cut and remove the grass in 2015 to reduce fertility and so optimize conditions for wildflowers. This was achieved using a wide range of approaches. Nearly 25% of members use grazing animals rather than mowing the grass to make hay or otherwise dispose of it. Although members who managed their meadows like this reported no difficulty finding animals (and some will keep animals themselves), there were some difficulties reported by people who wanted animals for aftermath grazing.



About half of the respondents made hay, either themselves or by local farmers or contractors. Those who have an arrangement with a local farmer reported few difficulties, most likely because the hay is taken as payment or part-payment for the work. Those depending on a contractor were more likely to have some difficulties. This seemed particularly so for people wishing to cut and collect the grass rather than make hay. Although MMG provides lists of contractors for grass cutting and other land management work, it is not clear that everyone is aware of these.

We also asked people about other problems with managing their meadows, including the encroachment of nettles, brambles and bracken, over-dominant grasses

etc, and provided space for people to outline any particular problems they had that MMG might help them to address.

Finally, we asked people which MMG activities were most important to them. The three most universally valued services were the botanical surveys, management advice and the newsletter. The three least used services were the

use of the Tracmaster, the ponies and work parties although these were still important to between 30% and 40% of respondents.

The survey questions and full results, including the additional comments and suggestions made by members can be viewed using the link from the MMG website. If anyone has any comments or questions about the survey, please contact Glynis at glynislaws@hotmail.co.uk

Our stand at the Usk Show this year, one of several outings for our stall. We appreciate the help of our team of volunteers at these events.



Ida's Meadow

Many of our members will know the beautiful meadows at Four Acres in Maryland, on The Narth, which has been one of our open meadows on several occasions over the years. This was the home of Ida Dunn, a founder member of MMG. Ida was passionate about caring for her land. She passed away in 2014, aged 102, and her executors kindly decided to give one acre of the land to MMG. In her will, Ida included MMG as a beneficiary of an as yet unknown sum of money. The land transfer has now been completed, and we are the proud owners of the field we have named Ida's Meadow in her memory.



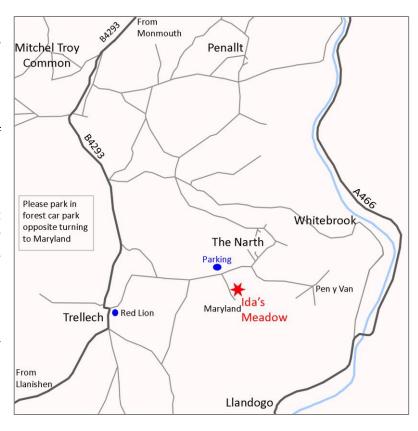




Ida's Meadow is rich in wild flowers and has one of the best displays of Greater Butterfly Orchids in the county. There are Harebells, Devils'-bit Scabious, Lousewort, Tormentil and Wood Horsetail among many other species.

Our land covers about an acre to the left of the drive to Four Acres house, and we have installed a display board close to the road. If you have not been to the meadow the map opposite shows its location, but please park in the forest parking opposite the Maryland turning rather than driving down the lane. Note that the driveway to Four Acres house is not our property, so please keep to the road verge.

The photographs show the display board, and Owain Rees who cut and cleared the land for us this year with his small tractor and collector.



Dates for your Diary

Check our web site www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk for details, location maps and updates

October

Friday 21st: *Dean Meadows Group* meeting. Jerry Green, the Head Gardener at Westbury Court Garden, will give a talk about managing the grounds that The National Trust acquired around the garden. 7:30 at Westbury on Severn Parish Hall.

Saturday 22nd: MMG members are invited to *Transition Usk Apple Pressing Day* at Llanllowell Meadows (Llanllowell House, Llanllywel, Usk, NP15 1LL) hosted by Hamish Sandison. Open 1pm to 3pm. Bring your own apples and/or pears and bottles and make your own juice. Kids activities (apple bobbing, apple crafts, singing by the fire) and other apple related offerings. Bring food for yourself and to share – soup, cheese and bread will be provided, plus gas stoves and an open fire for cooking.

Sunday 23rd: *Apple Day* at the Woodland Trust's *Cefn Ila* reserve at SO359005. Activities include a re-enactment group, music, apple pressing, camp fire baked apples for children, and stalls including MMG. Free shuttle buses from Usk car park will run all day. For more information, email cefnila@woodlandtrust.org.uk

Thursday 27th: MMG *Autumn Get-together* in Usk, at the Centenary Hall. Full details and booking form on our web site (see page 3 of this newsletter)

Friday 28th: Council for the Protection of Rural Wales (CPRW) Monmouthshire branch AGM, 7.30 pm at The Shire Hall, Monmouth, with an illustrative talk by Colin Passmore on making the most of our natural landscape and heritage. More details on their web site

Saturday 29th: *Parish Grasslands Project Autumn Event* 'A Taste of the Hudnalls' with afternoon foraging for wild food, and an evening meeting to reveal findings and discuss recipes. Details on their web site

November

Tuesday 8th: A talk by Steph Tyler to *Gwent Wildlife Trust* members and others about meadows and Monmouthshire Meadows Group. 7.30pm at The Ballroom, Glen-yr-Afon House Hotel, Usk, entrance £3. More details on the GWT web site

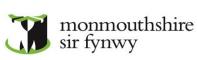
Monmouthshire Meadows Group is grateful for all the help both financial and physical given by our members. We are also indebted to the following for their sponsorship and help –

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

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

Our leaflet *Management of Grasslands for Wildlife* was funded by **Gwent Wildlife Trust** with a grant from **Monmouthshire Natural**Assets Project

A full list of grants received for the purchase of Kingcoed Meadows will be available in due course. We are particularly grateful for the large grant from Biffa Award, without which the target would not have been reached.











Supported by





