

Monmouthshire Meadows

Issue 31

Registered Charity No. 1111345

Autumn 2019

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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Contact Us

For information about the group or to join MMG contact our membership secretary Marilyn Dunkelmann marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk tel. **01600 860031**, or use our [online membership form](#)

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

Contact details for the rest of our Committee, as well as news and events, and information about our meadow reserves at Kingcoed, Maryland and Trellech, are on our web site www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk

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From the Chair

Rachel Morgan

Firstly I would like to thank, on behalf I am sure of all the MMG members and committee, Steph Tyler for her sterling work as Chairman over the last ten years. But although Steph will be taking a back seat from administration, she will still be at the forefront of survey work undertaken, as well as continuing to take a keen interest in all Group activities. Steph's commitment cannot be overstated.

Some very pleasing news was that the Group is 2019 winner of the Wye Valley AONB Farming Awards. Dick and Marilyn collected the trophy at the Monmouth Show together with a £400 cheque. The award recognises the work of farmers and land managers who make an outstanding contribution to conserving and enhancing the landscape of the Wye Valley, in our case by the combined work of all our members who look after our valuable species-rich grasslands.

Meadows and the importance of wild flowers have received unprecedented publicity over the summer. Gardeners' World had a whole programme dedicated to wild flower enrichment. Plantlife's verge campaign, which started in 2013, has gained momentum and this has elicited further interest in the national and local media. Plantlife continues to keep up a dialogue with councils and their highways teams and has just launched its



Dick and Marilyn (and Isca) at the award ceremony for the AONB Farming Awards 2019 at the Monmouth Show

Road Verge Guidelines providing practical advice on how local authorities can fulfil their biodiversity duties whilst reducing management burdens over time. Dorset County Council has already demonstrated that it has been saving money in the process of adopting new management. Since starting the regime in 2014, the council estimates it has saved around £30,000 a year.

Surveys

Steph, Elsa Wood and Sheelagh Kerry have done about 30 surveys of plants on land owned by a host of new members. The areas surveyed have ranged from less than half an acre to up to 20 acres. Amongst these are some very exciting areas which merit Local Wildlife Site status. If we haven't visited you yet we do aim to do so, but please email us to remind us.

Reserves

With a slow start to the summer, the flowers were a little later than usual in peak flowering. But with hot weather in July and August everything caught up and hay-making has been relatively easy. All the fields we manage have been cut and carted with margins left around the edges for the bees. We have recently updated our contractors' list on our web site, so please check them out ready for next summer if you feel you need help with your meadow.

At Ida's meadow a work task was held to remove invading Bracken and the hay was cut during August.

At Kingcoed Meadows, Roger Ruston counted an impressive total of 51 long-horned bees on one day, gathered at clumps of Tufted Vetch. This compares with just 11 counted on 30 June 2018. Arthur Harris has been cutting the hay for the last few decades, but has now retired so we have moved to contractors Alistair and Ian Morgan who made small bales this year.



*Baling hay on Wet Meadow, Jack Kedward of New House Farm
Lydart produced 63 large bales (Dick Coates)*



*Pew with a View. Trellech resident
Ray (@lliswerryguy) took this picture
of our bench in Wet Meadow*

The hedge which was planted at Wet Meadow on a work task in March is growing up nicely, all thanks to volunteers from MMG, Gwent Wildlife Trust and Wye Valley AONB. The plants were given by the Long Forest Project, a Keep Wales Tidy and Woodland Trust initiative. Dick Coates, having worked very hard minding the grazing Welsh Mountain sheep, was rewarded with wonderful display of flowers. In particular the Bird's-foot Trefoil and Knapweed put on a good show whilst orchids appeared in many new areas.

Winter work includes replacing the not entirely stock proof fence on the western boundary, and setting the road gate in to the field for safety. We shall keep members informed of work parties for this, as we would appreciate help.

Members' Meadows

David Llewellyn was put to work on the Tracmaster and in one day he cut a small garden meadow at Penallt, a meadow in Monmouth, about half an acre on Beacon Hill and another half an acre at Old Church Farm at Penallt. Lindsay Tyler also mowed an orchard and path through meadows and woodland in the Llanthony Valley.

Ponies

Our Exmoor ponies, Jemima and Jacinth again spent their summer at Jane and Tony Pannett near Tintern. They are currently on Mitchel Troy Common. Any member who has stock-proof fields and would like some grazing, please be in touch.

Many thanks as always to Steph and Alan Poulter who transport the ponies around the county.

AGM and Open Days

We enjoyed an excellent buffet prepared by members, organised by Judith Carruthers, at Llanishen Village Hall for our AGM and Spring talk. Elsa Wood, joint vice county recorder for the BSBI (Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland), and a familiar face to long-standing members, gave a fascinating account of the changes in the flora of Monmouthshire over the last 100 years.

This year we opened three meadows and we were blessed with fine weather. We started mid-June with meadows near Shirenewton. Northridge House meadow and woodland plantation covering 12 acres was acquired by the Robinson's nearly 20 years ago. The 11 acres of fields between Shirenewton and Mynyddbach were protected by an association formed in 2006. Both sites were looking lovely with an abundance of interesting flowers. Very many thanks to Sheelagh and Rowena Kerry for providing delicious teas.

A week later, together with Gwent Wildlife Trust, we opened three meadows near Trellech. New Grove Meadows reserve is Monmouthshire's Coronation Meadow, one of the very best wildflower meadows in the county. Wet Meadow is the reserve managed jointly by MMG and Gwent Wildlife Trust and lies a little south of New Grove. This was the first year in many decades that the fields have not had stock, which meant a fantastic display of orchids, Betony and other flowers. Ida's Meadow, a small site full of Greater Butterfly-orchids a couple of miles away, belonged to Ida Dunn, a great supporter of our group. After her death 2014, her

executors gifted this field to MMG. We had 64 visitors over the three sites on the day. Sue Flower provided delicious tea and cakes for our visitors at Trellech and many of our members helped as volunteer hosts.

In mid-July, Ruaridh and Caroline MacDonald very kindly opened their extensive meadows again at Blaentrophy Farm near Grosmont. Opened a month later than last year, a different array of flowers was on show with Sneezewort Yarrow in full flower. Incorporating an SSSI, these are probably the most important and largest area of species-rich grassland in Monmouthshire. Thanks to excellent publicity and the recent airing of the wild-flower edition of *Gardeners' World*, we had an unprecedented 60 visitors.

MMG was present at the National Bee Day Festival at The Nelson Garden in Monmouth, Gwent Wildlife Trust's Open Farm Sunday at Pentwyn reserve, and at the Chepstow and Usk Shows together with Bee Friendly Monmouthshire. We thank Phil Powell of Gwent Energy for sponsoring the tent at Chepstow.

Other News

It now seems that the small parcel of land which includes the Virtuous Well is not ownerless. We are still investigating the possibilities to take on the management in a more formal way.

Two small areas in Monmouth contain interesting species. At Cornpoppy Avenue on the Rockfield estate on a piece of 'waste ground' we counted 172 Bee Orchids. The land is owned by a developer and they

contract out the 'management'. Sadly, this included strimming the orchids and a range of other flowers while in their prime.

Meanwhile at the Rockfield Road pond, opposite the fire station, Pyramid Orchids and other interesting species were spotted having escaped the mower. Together with the Nature isn't Neat initiative in Monmouth, we are working with the council to find ways to protect these and other similar sites.

Rachel Morgan



Neville Hart of Gwent Wildlife Trust leads a flower walk at our open meadow in Trellech (Carol Cook)



Bee Orchid among Bird's-foot trefoil, Cornpoppy Lane, Monmouth

MMG Autumn Social

Wednesday 23rd October, Monmouth Priory, 7pm

Our Autumn Social this year is at the Priory in Monmouth, a beautiful old building in the centre of town. Our guest speaker is Carol Cook of Wye Valley Hedgehog Rescue. Carol will be talking about hedgehog ecology, how numbers are declining and how you can give them a helping hand, illustrating the benefits of wildflower meadows for wildlife such as these charming animals.

Our meetings are a great way of meeting like-minded meadows enthusiasts, comparing notes and learning from others' experience. As well as the talk, and an update about MMG activities, there is plenty of time to chat and get to know each other.

We shall have our usual buffet supper after the talk. The buffet is £14 for members, £17 for non-members. To attend just for the talks, there is no charge for MMG members, non-members £2.

Please book in advance to allow us to plan the catering. You can do this on our web site where there is a booking form, or contact Marilyn marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk, 01600 860031.

Don't forget to tell us if you have any special or dietary requirements when you book (we always have a good selection of vegetarian options on the menu).

We shall send details for online payment, or you can send a cheque, made payable to Monmouthshire Meadows Group, to The Beeches, The Narth, Monmouth NP25 4QL.

Getting There

Monmouth Priory is in Priory Street (B4293) in the centre of Monmouth, postcode NP25 3NX. There is on-street parking opposite, or a public car park nearby in Glendower Street (opposite the Blake Theatre). There are directions and a map [on the Priory's web site www.monmouthpriory.net](http://www.monmouthpriory.net).

Please contact one of the committee members if you would like to arrange a lift.



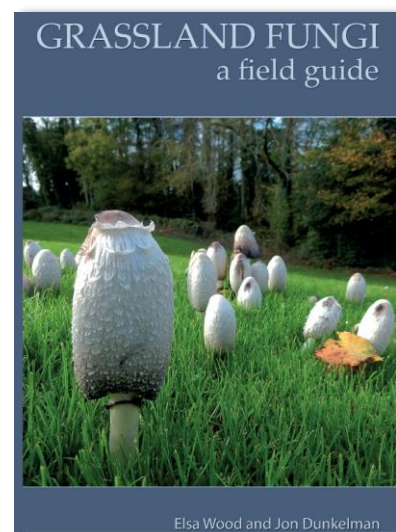
One of Carol's rescue hedgehogs, now successfully returned to the wild

The Fungi Season is Here

Brightly coloured Waxcaps and intriguingly shaped corals and spindles are appearing in our grassland, and we have the perfect way to recognise them all.

Our identification guide ***Grassland Fungi: A Field Guide***, published in 2017, is the only guide dedicated specifically to fungi found in grassland, and offers the great advantage of multiple photographs of each major species.

Available for the normal retail price £19.99 from www.nhbs.com, and at MMG events at a special price for members.



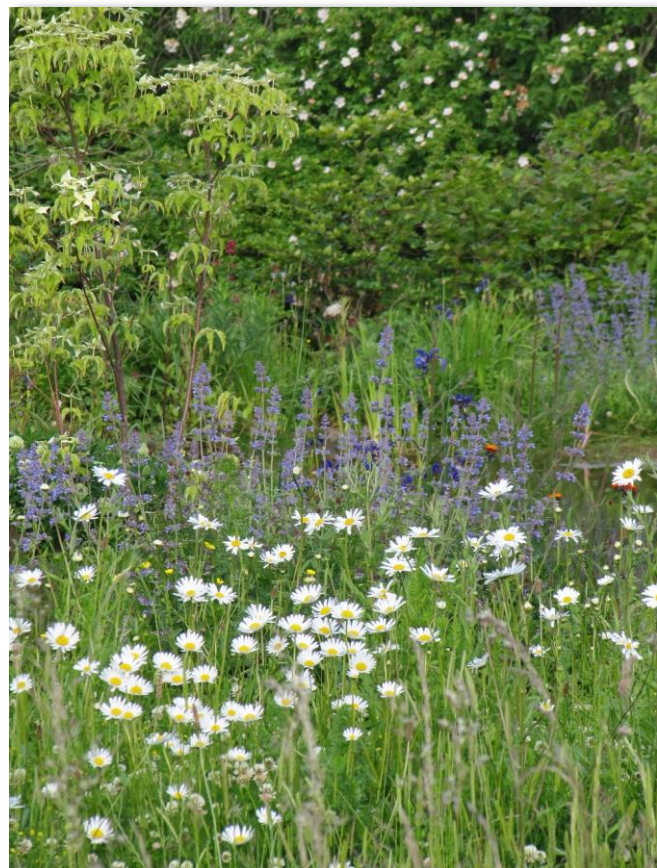
Changing Hearts and Minds

Why we must learn that Nature isn't Neat, by Cheryl Cummings

Cheryl is a professional garden designer and wildlife enthusiast involved with Monmouth Town Council's Nature isn't Neat campaign, and currently presenting a series of monthly workshops on wildlife friendly gardening at Monmouth Shire Hall. See Cheryl's work on her web site gardendesignerwales.co.uk

As a group of like-minded people who value our meadows for their beauty, unique species mixes and for the diversity of wildlife they support, we might hope that our interest and knowledge of native flora is fairly widespread, but we'd be wrong.

After 30 years working with hundreds of garden owners (although there are notable exceptions, some even members of MMG!) it's been my experience that many people have difficulty identifying more than one or two native plants and some couldn't even name an oak tree. Far too many gardeners have a relationship with nature that is reduced to slicing the heads off dandelion and daisy flowers if they dare to raise them above mower height and the most common and depressing question I'm asked at least weekly is 'Is this a plant or a weed?'

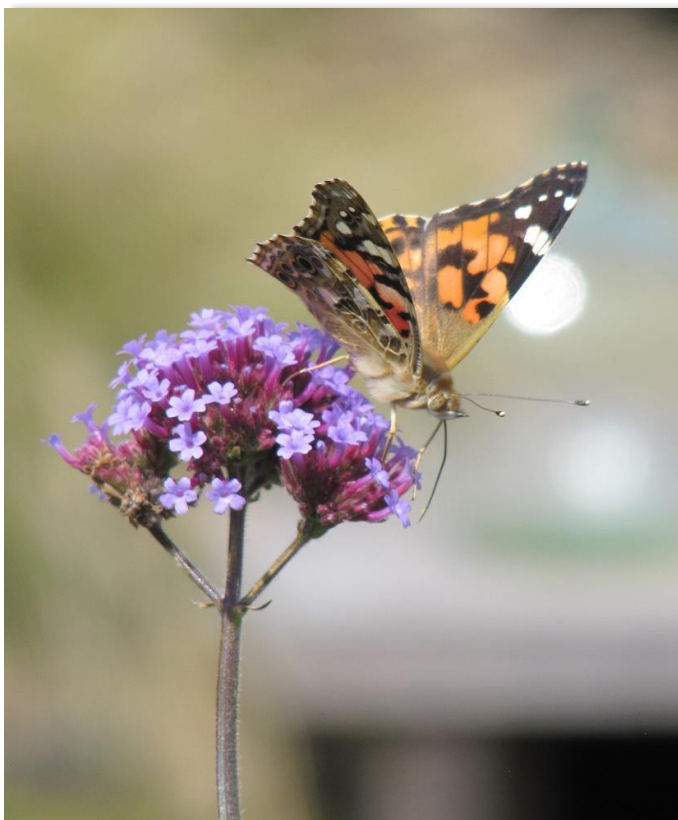


Those without much knowledge to the contrary have believed that a successful garden must be controlled, its plants chosen from a range of hybridised natives from anywhere but here and kept in their place by strict management and death by sprayer. This mindset and subsequent divorce from nature in the garden, the place we are closest to it, has culminated in the widespread and increasing use of the ecological disaster of artificial turf. Plastic grass, always green, clean and tidy, no mowing, no effort and of course no life.

In this war against perceived 'weeds' for which read almost all native plants and 'pests' which usually includes most insects at least during a part of their life cycle, most mammals apart from hedgehogs, and birds apart from the pretty little ones; on the side of those of us doing our best to protect what is left of our natural world, a small band of reinforcements has arrived fighting on the side of the pollinators.

The Nature Isn't Neat initiative funded by the Welsh Government and based in Monmouth is led by Monmouth Town Council in partnership with local experts from Bees For Development, Transition Monmouth, Bee Friendly Monmouthshire and Monmouthshire Meadows Group. Through it the

County Council has changed its mowing and maintenance regimes, there will be talks to schools, workshops for the public to attend, more trees planned for public spaces, solitary bee houses on business premises, the town's containers are now planted with insect friendly perennials and next year should see two of Monmouth's roundabouts planted with more insect friendly perennials instead of wasteful seasonal bedding.



Although this is just one small initiative it's a welcome sign that the plight of nature, pollinators in particular, is being taken seriously at local government level. Slowly humans are catching on that our own survival is dependent on those elements of the natural world which we have so long dismissed as 'pests'.

There are huge battles to be won and I have been fighting my corner using two of the characteristics which made us the most destructive species on earth, avarice and envy. I find my clients through my website which I fill with aspirational photos. Keeping up with the Joneses has for years resulted in manicured and sterile gardens so I don't apologise for my methods, the ends justify the means. If carefully nurtured wildlife friendly gardens can look like the ones in the upmarket and fashionable magazines then so much the better.

As I sit in my garden writing this I'm surrounded by a multitude of insects busily feasting on the flowers, birds flit between the trees causing the squirrel to chatter noisily and I know that come dusk when the night shift takes over, the bats will be zooming through picking off the moths so numerous over the surface of the pond and the hedgehogs will come snuffling through the meadow lawn. As I tell my clients, you don't get that with plastic grass.



Welcome to our New Members

We are delighted to welcome these new members to the group:

Ron Adam, Llanvihangel Gobion
Charlotte Bates, Whitebrook
Mark & Sue Belcher, Tintern
John Benson, Monmouth
Simon Brook, Penhow
Paul Cochrane, Coedypaen
Steve & Jennifer Davis, Cross Ash
Annie Dawson, Pen y Fan, The North
Charlotte Downs, Cwm-du, Crickhowell
Paul Dunsford, Pen y Fan, The North
Maria Dzaleta, Abergavenny
Sylvia & Robert Fowles, Llangwm
Kerry Galey, Mynyddislwyn
Cornelius Garrett, Earlswood
Viv Geen, Little Tarrington

Jonathan Hales, The Hudnalls, St Briavels
Caroline Lidgett, Chepstow
Zoë Lindgren, Llandogo
Sarah Lloyd, Penallt
Drew Morton, Llangybi
Gill Parsons, Llanddewi, Rhydderch
Deanna Price, Much Marcle
Stephen Smith, Caerwent
Mike Stockwell, Trellech
Stephen Swell, Maryland, The North
Mary Teiser, Walford
Jill Thomas, Monmouth
Olwen Veevers, Cross Ash
Mr R and Mrs H Ward, Raglan
Terry & Alison Wood, St Arvans

Hedgehog Update

Carol Cook, Wye Valley Hedgehog Rescue

It has been a busy summer for orphaned and abandoned hoglets. We are delighted to have had a 100% success rate with our hand-reared hoglets here this year, with some already released back to the wild.

We continue to deal with avoidable injuries caused by football netting, steep ponds, garden machinery, chemicals and cars. One lucky hedgehog, unable to walk on admission, made a remarkable recovery thanks to the quick actions of a member of the public. The hedgehog was found on the side of the road, partially paralysed, but alive, we suspect possibly hit by a car. We took her to our vets where she received treatment, including x-rays for a suspected shoulder injury. She responded very well in care and has since been released. Please always check animals on the road, they may still be alive.

Autumn is in the air and the hedgehogs need to build up their fat reserves for hibernation. Autumn juveniles – late born or second litter hoglets – can struggle to make the suggested hibernation weight of 500-600g, so if you see small hedgehogs out in the day, please ring us for advice. And as nature's larder reduces, please consider leaving out cat or hedgehog biscuits and a shallow bowl of water.

The big mealworm debate

Should you feed hedgehogs mealworms? No. **Please do not feed mealworms to hedgehogs.** We know they love them, but they have a very poor calcium/phosphorus ratio, as do two other food favourites, peanuts and sunflower hearts. These foods can cause metabolic bone disease. Please watch this informative video from the vets at Vale Wildlife Hospital, explaining the tragic consequences of this disease. www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBjUhQN4STc

Spotted a hedgehog?

You can log your sightings on the Big Hedgehog Map here www.bighedgehogmap.org. The data from this map is being used to provide information on hedgehog populations nationwide.

We continue with our release project for those hedgehogs unable to return to their place of origin. We do always try to return a hedgehog to their place of origin, there has to be an exceptional reason why they need to be relocated. So, if you find a hedgehog needing help please make a note of the location. The release project is going well, with regular sightings being reported by local people. We have just started our first hedgehog survey at the release site and will be rolling this out across the area.

Bonfires! #rememberhedgehogs

You see a bonfire, wildlife sees a fantastic ready-made home! So please, please check your bonfire before lighting. We always suggest moving the bonfire before lighting. You will invariably find not just hedgehogs, but other small animals have made their home. It is very distressing for all those involved dealing with burns victims, so please help us help them.

Please check for hedgehogs before using garden

machinery, including hand-held forks when turning compost heaps, these being another beloved readymade home for hedgehogs.

Please do not use slug pellets in your garden, slugs form part of the hedgehogs' diet, so not only do they harm hedgehogs, but also damage their food chain. A recent ban on metaldehyde slug pellets has been overturned, so we must continue to raise awareness on this issue. Keep all netting a foot above the ground so the hedgehog can travel underneath.

Finally...

Please note our change of name and email address to wyeahedgehogs@gmail.com. Wye Valley Hedgehog Rescue rescues, rehabilitates and releases hedgehogs. If you find a hedgehog out in the day, or injured, please ring us on 01600 860375 or 07922 176767. Please note we are entirely volunteer run so may not answer straight away but we will return your call. In an emergency contact your local vet or Vale Wildlife Hospital on 01386 882288.



Ash Dieback and Other Concerns

Rachel Morgan has consolidated some information on websites to give a layman's take on ash die back and other tree afflictions.

Most of us who have some meadow or garden, also have trees. Trees are susceptible to fungal decay, and bacterial and viral infection. The tragic Dutch Elm Disease spread by the elm bark beetle was caused by a fungus which blocked the tree's water transport systems, killing the tree.



Ash dieback in tree crown (Public Domain image, Wikimedia Commons)

Another fungus which does the same thing is now affecting our ash trees, threatening the same catastrophic loss. Ash dieback is caused by the fungus



Ash Dieback (Courtesy Fera Science Ltd)

Hymenoscyphus fraxineus (formerly *Chalara fraxinea*). It has swept westwards from Poland where it was first described in 1992 and was first identified in Britain in 2012. Since then there has been a ban on the movement of ash trees. But it was already too late, spread of the disease was as a result of the planting of infected nursery stock, movement of wood, and also wind-borne distribution of the fungal spores. Ash die back is now present throughout the UK, and has been in Monmouthshire for the last three years or so.

Young trees are particularly vulnerable and die quickly once they succumb. Older trees can resist infection for some time until eventually dying or becoming weakened and succumbing to attack from another pest or pathogen, such as the honey fungus.

How do I know I have got it?

There are several key signs to look out for: blackening and wilting of leaves and shoots in mid- to late summer; dark lesions or cankers – often long, thin and diamond-shaped – appear on the trunk at the base of dead side shoots; small white fruiting bodies can be found on blackened leaf stalks in late summer and early autumn. Saplings have dead tops and side shoots. In mature trees, dieback of twigs and branches in the crown, often with bushy growth further down the branches where new shoots have been produced. But all of these symptoms can also be caused by other problems, so final diagnosis should be made by an expert. You can find more detailed information on forestresearch.gov.uk.

So what should I do?

There is nothing you can do to avert it. There is no cure. And pollarding or coppicing will not save the tree. But there is a tiny chance of reducing spread disrupting the fungus's life cycle by burning, burying or deep composting fallen ash leaves. If composting the leaves, cover them with a thick layer of other plant material, and leave the heap undisturbed for a year. This is likely to prevent any spore dispersal. There is no need to report it as it is already known to be in this area. And there is no need to fell the tree unless it poses a safety threat. There is a remote possibility that it may recover. There is no problem with using the wood, either for firewood, or long-term products.

Phytophthora ramorum, Sudden Oak Death

Another fungus affecting our trees in the last ten years is *Phytophthora ramorum*. This name sudden oak death actually comes from the USA where it has had a severe effect the native oak there. But the good news here is that so far native British oaks hardly seem susceptible. In Britain the biggest casualty is larch. The fungus also attacks horse chestnut, sweet chestnut, ash and also shrubs such as *Viburnum*, *Cameli* and *Rhododendron*.

The fungus affected very few trees in the UK until 2009, when it was found to be killing large numbers of larch trees in South West England. A year later it had spread to South Wales. This was the first time in the world that a large numbers of conifer tree species had been infected. Present in many British woodlands, *Rhododendron* is perhaps contributing to the spread as, like larch, it is highly susceptible, and once infected both produce especially large numbers of the spores which can spread many miles on moist air currents.

How do I know I have got it?

Symptoms include die back, leaf blackening and wilting of the shoots. A bleeding canker or tarry spots may develop, where liquid exudes from the infected bark. Removal of the outer bark reveals dying tissue beneath.

So what should I do?

If you think you have *Phytophthora* you should notify Natural Resources Wales. Infected plants and trees should be felled and removed, burnt or processed into wood products.

Thanks to websites of Forest Research, Royal Forestry Society, and Woodland Trust for their useful information.



Phytophthora on Japanese larch (DEFRA)

Committee News

There were a few changes to the committee at the AGM this year. Steph Tyler, as members know, stepped down as chair. Steph has been appointed Honorary President of the group, alongside Trevor Evans, a position which recognises their incredible contributions to MMG, and to wildflower conservation and knowledge over many years. Rachel Morgan, after a year as vice-chair, was elected Chair of the group.

Also stepping down from an official role was Sheelagh Kerry who has been our secretary for a few years. Sheelagh will continue on the committee as one of our principal botanists, undertaking surveys of members' land in the north and west of the county. New committee member Carol Cook has been appointed Secretary.

Cecilia Davies resigned from the committee and her tremendous contribution over the last few years, as membership secretary and a regular helper at our events, was recognised. Other roles remain the same, and the committee continues to thrive.

The committee is now:

President – Trevor Evans
President – Stephanie Tyler
Chair – Rachel Morgan
Treasurer – David Llewellyn
Secretary – Carol Cook
Membership Secretary/Editor – Marilyn Dunkelman
Press Officer – Pam Manfield
Trellech Wet Meadow – Dick Coates
Exmoor ponies – Stephanie Poulter
Members' surveys – Sheelagh Kerry
Clare Adamson
Judith Carruthers
Sarah Cheese

Converting to CIO

As reported in the last newsletter, a vote will be taken at the coming Autumn Meeting to agree the draft constitution with a view to converting the group to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation at the end of the current financial year.

Members' Meadows

All through summer we have been hearing of successes on our members' meadows, and we've had some on our own reserves too. On Trellech Wet Meadow we were thrilled to find our first Green-winged Orchid.

David Emerson reported his first Green-winged Orchids two years ago, and now has three flowering and at least two others appeared as non-flowering rosettes.



David Emerson's Glow-worm

David also sent this image of a glow-worm (left) spotted adjacent to his meadow last year, a rare sight these days (the picture was taken with aid of a torch as backlighting). David reports seeing another this year. His land is in a limestone area, which these creatures seem to prefer. (There is some fascinating

information about glow-worms on www.glowworms.org.uk)

Tom & Kate Pitts-Tucker reported their success with their meadow near St Maughans since joining MMG in 2014. They have a 10-acre smallholding, and focus their meadow efforts on a two-acre field. They introduced Yellow Rattle, which took well (the number of small bales of hay has reduced from 200 to 120). Two years ago a few Common Spotted-orchids appeared. Last year there were around 200 and a similar number appeared this year. The land has been designated a Local Wildlife Site.

Matt and Laura Dexter report their excitement at finding Adder's-tongue Fern amongst the flowers in their meadow at Tregare. Matt also sent some beautiful photographs of some of their other flowers, and as it was impossible to choose which to include, these are shown together on page 12.

Among other 'firsts' this summer we have flowers arriving in Carol Cook's meadow, including Yellow Rattle from seeds sown last year, and Ragged Robin near their new pond.

Some exciting first sightings, too, at The Beeches where Jon and Marilyn Dunkelman found their first Twayblade this year, the fifth orchid species for the site.



But there was even more excitement when bee expert Roger Ruston, who regularly surveys The Beeches' fields, reported finding a rarely recorded Hawk's-beard Nomad Bee (*Nomada facilis*), after a specimen was sent to the Bees Wasps and Ants Recording Society (BWARS) for formal identification. This bee was first recognised in the UK in 2017 with one discovered in Lewisham, but a re-examination of similar bees in national collections unearthed more specimens, all from Southern England, and apparently it appears they may have been around for at least 200 years. There is an article about finding this new species on *Discover Wildlife* (the web site of BBC Wildlife Magazine) at: www.discoverwildlife.com/news/new-bee-gets-scientists-buzzing

As it is fungus season again, we shall cheat a little and include some pictures sent in last autumn by Steve and Claire Owen of Garway in Hereford, who found these impressive specimens on their land, which we think from the pictures are Trooping Funnels (below).

Our final member's contribution is from Teona Dorrien-Smith, owner of Upper Red House Organic Farm at Llanvihangel (longer term members will remember open meadows days at this lovely site). Teona has written before of progress at the farm, and has sent the update which follows (page 13).



Carol's Ragged Robin



Carol's Yellow Rattler



Trooping Funnels (Steve & Claire Owen)



The Beeches' Twayblade (Jon Dunkelman)



Upper Red House Organic Farm

It's a few years since I wrote about the meadows here on the farm. Back then we were managing much of our neutral grassland as species rich hay-meadows, and were excited about a few orchids that had appeared. Now, after 15 years of the same management, the Common Spotted- and Southern Marsh-orchids are in their hundreds across the hay-fields, along with seven or eight grasses, masses of many other flowers, grass snakes, grasshoppers, butterflies, bees, moths and on and on.

This year a large patch of eye-bright took over part of a meadow – never noticed before - and it was intriguing to find a scattering of white Selfheal flowers (not blue).

I've given up battling the invasive Hogweed and the highly poisonous Hemlock Water Dropwort. It's beautiful, the invertebrates love it and the livestock seem to love it too (as long as they don't eat the Dropwort roots, they're fine).

There is far too much Yellow Rattle! So needless to say the hay crop has reduced from 7-8 round bales per acre to 3-4. Recent dry summers also have something to do with that.

Glastir payments make up for some of the financial loss, but when wandering through the fields in June, delighting in the life all around, who cares?

Our steeper fields have rough grazing among the ant-hills, loved by green wood-peckers and badgers. Last week a massive 30m circle of parasol mushrooms appeared on a slope. A small part of it made fabulous lunches and dinners for days.

continued...



Waxcaps will be back soon, and fungi in the woodland.

A quandary now is what to do about the need for more trees to mitigate climate change. How much of the bio-diverse meadows can I bear to lose to new woodland?

How do I balance biodiversity and CO₂ sequestration by grassland against the take up of CO₂ by new growth of trees? I expect the figures are out there. I must find them. Climate change is upon us and we're 50 years too late anyway, so perhaps we should just enjoy what's left, if we're lucky enough to have it. Maybe I'll invite a few beavers, which would be fun. (Sorry to be negative, but the science is undeniable).



Our small woodland, orchard and most of our pasture are registered as Local Wildlife Sites (about 55 acres or 22 hectares). I don't have a current plant list, but all are welcome to come and look by appointment, or to walk the public and permissive footpaths across the farm. All plant and insect surveyors welcome.

Teona Dorrien-Smith (01600 780501, teona.ds@gmail.com)

We love to hear about your meadow successes. Please send news and photographs, with reasonably high resolution please, to marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk

MMG's Contractors List

On the MMG web site there is a list of contractors who provide useful services for managing wildflower meadows. We are in the process of checking and updating this list. If readers know of anyone who should be included, please send us their details.

We are particularly keen to find more contractors willing to cut and bale, or cut and collect hay, particularly on small fields and in different parts of the county. Finding contractors able to do this at the height of the season is a problem for many MMG members.

One contractor who has helped many of our members in the Monmouth area is Owain Rees (Blade Meadow Services blademeadowservices@gmail.com), who undertakes many kinds of work but is most useful to our members for his cutting and collecting equipment which can work on small areas of land. The cuttings are taken from the field and dumped in a compost heap where any water leaching through will not drain onto the fields. Owain has just upgraded his equipment and has sent these images of his new machinery.

Does anyone know of any contractors with similar equipment in other areas of the county?



Gwent Wildlife Trust's Bridewell Appeal

As many MMG members will know, the Trust have been fundraising to purchase Bridewell Common, 81.45 acres of ancient marshland which is linked to their Magor Marsh Nature Reserve on the wildlife-rich Gwent Levels.

They are very close to their target of £250,000, but need a bit more to secure the full amount of funds. If you can give something to help, donations can be made:

- by phone with a card, (01600 740600 during normal office hours)
- by cheque, payable to Gwent Wildlife Trust, to GWT Bridewell Appeal, Seddon House, Dingestow, Monmouth NP25 4DY
- online via their Bridewell appeal web page at www.gwentwildlife.org/appeal

Any funds raised over and above the cost of purchasing the land will support future restoration and management of Bridewell Common to enhance the biodiversity on the nature reserve.

Trellech Forest School

Trellech Primary School regularly hold lessons in the woodland near their school, and also on our Trellech Wet Meadow reserve. The school has given us permission to publish the pictures below of their reception class taken during a session of Mindfulness in the Meadow. Many thanks to them, and what a wonderful opportunity for the children to learn about the natural world.



Plantlife's Verge Campaign

In September this year, Plantlife published new guidelines for verge management to encourage wildflowers. Aimed primarily at councils, it is the result of collaboration with national highways agencies, industry contractors and other wildlife and conservation organisations.

Plantlife believe that this year, finally, there is an increase in awareness of the importance and potential of road verge habitats, and many councils are now starting to take notice and change their practices.

The guidelines promote a 'less and later' two-cut approach which, they say, will help to replenish the seed bank, restore floral diversity, save councils money and provide pollinator habitat estimated to equal the size of London, Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh and Cardiff combined.

The guidelines can be downloaded [from the Plantlife web site](#).

Seed

MMG has some mixed meadow seed remaining from this year's harvest from Gwent Wildlife Trust reserves. Contact the committee for details if you are interested in having some.

Richard Gregson

It is with great sadness that we heard of the death of our member Richard Gregson, from Whitebrook, following a long illness. We send condolences to his wife Julia and their family.



MMG Celebrates the Decision on the M4 Extension

It is great news for the Gwent Levels that the proposed M4 Relief Road has been scrapped. First Minister Mark Drakeford said it would be too expensive and would have an adverse environmental impact. The new 14-mile six lane road would have stretched from Castleton, past Newport, to Magor and was originally proposed in 1991 to relieve congestion at the Brynglas Tunnels. The scheme had already been shelved twice and after the recent public inquiry overall costs have reached £44 million.

It is especially pleasing that Mark Drakeford based the decision on the intrinsic value of the Gwent Levels, not just economic grounds.

The news came through on the day of an MMG Committee meeting so we celebrated with a bottle of champagne. We were very impressed with the tremendous amount of work put into opposing the scheme at the Public Inquiry, particularly by the CALM group (Campaign Against the Levels Motorway), by our friends at Gwent Wildlife Trust, and many other conservation groups and individuals. Congratulations to everyone who worked so hard to bring about this reversal, and good luck to those working towards a sustainable future for transport in the region. There is still a long way to go, but we must take heart from these victories.



Gwent Levels landscape; Photo © Robin Drayton (cc-by-sa/2.0)

Dates for your Diary

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

Sunday 6th October: Gwent Fungus Group Open Event at Pentwyn Farm, Gwent Wildlife Trust's reserve in Penallt (NP25 4SE). Open to all to learn more about fungi, find specimens and meet the experts on UK Fungus Day. Free admission, 2pm to 4pm. Free admission, [see GWT web site for directions](#)

Saturday 12th October: Parish Grasslands Project meeting on **Restoring Meadows**. Four speakers with a wealth of experience: Caroline Hanks (organiser of Hereford Meadows Forum), Sue Holland (Herefordshire Nature Trust), David Whittington (Monmouthshire Meadows Group member) and Bruce Langridge (National Botanical Garden of Wales). Starting at 2pm, free admission. [More information on the PGP web site www.parishgrasslandsproject.org.uk](http://www.parishgrasslandsproject.org.uk)

Wednesday 23rd October: MMG Autumn Meeting and Social, 7pm at The Priory, Monmouth, with speaker Carol Cook of Wye Valley Hedgehog Rescue. [Details in this newsletter, booking form online on the MMG web site](#)

Tuesday 5th November: **Nature Isn't Neat** campaign present an evening with Brigit Strawbridge Howard, author of *Dancing with Bees*, at the Shire Hall, Monmouth, 7.30pm to 9pm. Free of charge, please book with Alison Howard NiN@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Tuesday 3rd December: **Nature Isn't Neat** campaign present an evening with artist and bee activist Alex Hirtzel, at the Shire Hall, Monmouth, 7.30pm to 9pm. Free of charge, please book with Alison Howard NiN@monmouthshire.gov.uk

Tuesday 10th December: Gwent Wildlife Trust talk on **The Plight of the Hedgehogs**, at the Library of the Sessions House, 43 Maryport Street, Usk NP15 1AD. A Hedgehog Helpline Cymru Volunteer explains their work, 7.30pm to 9.30pm, admission £3 (members and non-members welcome). [More details on the GWT web site](#)

Tuesday 10th March: Gwent Wildlife Trust talk on the **Fascination of Fungi** by Elsa Wood, 7:30pm - 9:30pm Library of the sessions House, 43 Maryport Street, Usk NP15 1AD. £3 entrance

Gwent Wildlife Trust runs events throughout the year. A full list of their events, booking details and locations can be found on www.gwentwildlife.org/whats-on