

Monmouthshire Meadows

Issue 33

Registered Charity No. 1111345

Autumn 2020

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 Dunkelman 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

We had another long hot summer. While good to leave cutting as late as possible to benefit the late pollinating insects, it is easy to forget that no matter how warm the days, early September brings heavy dew. We have been caught out this year at Ida's Meadow. There was a bout of heavy rain at the end of August and then Owain Rees, who was due to cut, broke a prop shaft. As I write the meadow remains uncut. We always have enquiries about seed and Steph has given a very good summary of what to do and not to do on page 5.

Of course all meetings and open days have had to be cancelled and our Autumn meet is being transformed into a Zoom meeting (page 4). In particular we are seeking a new member of the committee to take the minutes; our ever-efficient Carol is moving to France. Committee meetings are enjoyable, friendly, and relaxed get-togethers and we always welcome new blood. As well as voting in the new committee, members are invited to approve the conversion to a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation). There are further details currently on the website.

It was interesting to re-read on our website the newsletters going back to 2007. There is always so much to learn, even if I know I have read it before! Consistent reports of dreadful July and Augusts have given way in the last few years to long hot summers. I sought to confirm this by looking up the local historical data as supplied by the Met Office (www.metoffice.gov.uk). However, I did not really glean anything useful or find any patterns. No doubt there are PhD's out there who could present an analysis. As the records go back to the 1930s, I was able to observe that summers recently have been much hotter. But then we all know that already...

Published this October
The second edition of MMG's
field guide to Grassland Fungi
Details on page 5

GRASSLAND FUNGI a field guide Second edition



Elsa Wood and Jon Dunkelman
Additional photographs by Keith Moseley and Malcolm Schuyf



a socially distanced tea party and presented Dick with the original painted map which formed the basis for the sign. See his notes on Wet Meadow on page 6.

Jacynth and Jemima, our Exmoor ponies, again spent their summer with Jane and Tony Pannett near Tintern. They are currently in Trellech awaiting news of their winter home. Many thanks as always to Steph and Alan Poulter who see to their every need. Also thanks to David Llewellyn has done a great job of mowing grassland at a range of sites for members who have relatively small fields or meadows in their gardens.

With lockdown there seems to have been a nationwide increased interest in gardening and which has included promotion of organic gardening, using no peat, leaving lawns for the bees, no mow May etc. See on page 15 the new bee-friendly accreditation for plants (in Wales at least). The scheme stipulates that not only are the plants proven to be attractive to pollinators but that they are grown in peat-free compost. I wonder if that stretches as far as germinated in peat-free compost?

I have struggled to find good peat-free compost. The [EthicalConsumer.org](https://ethicalconsumer.org) gives a good roundup. I am going to do a trial of the three most recommended types which are all from local companies: Carbon Gold, SylvaGrow, and Fertile Fibre. Recently I was given some Moreland Gold to try. This it turns out is not peat-free but is environmentally friendly in that it uses 'peat deposits ... and leaf mould from lakes and dams, where they have collected, having been naturally washed into rivers and streams by rainwater'. How sustainable this would be with increased demand is hard to say.

At Wet Meadow we have made a start in utilising the grants from Trellech United Community Council and the Welsh Church Fund. There is now an informative and attractive sign at the main entrance in Roman Way, shown in the picture below.

We celebrated Wet Meadow's 'custodian' Dick Coates 80th birthday with

Top left: Wet Meadow, wilting and bailing in 24 hours (Ray @Iliswerryguy)

Above right: Dick and Isca overseeing the harvesting (Ray @Iliswerryguy)

Right: The newly installed information board at Trellech Wet Meadow, designed by Art Matters Studio, Gilwern (Dick Coates)



And finally from me a very special thank you to the unsung hero of MMG - Marilyn who is the glue that holds it all together. Another project in which she is involved in the background is the new publication of the second edition of the hugely successful Grassland Fungi field guide by Elsa Wood and Marilyn's husband Jon Dunkelman.

Rachel Morgan



Surveys of Grassland Sites in 2020

Steph Tyler

Despite the obvious problems this spring and summer, Elsa Wood, Sheelagh Kerry and I have managed to visit the land of 15 new members and carry out plant surveys at each and give advice on management. We have also re-visited four sites to look at the progress in increasing plant diversity with appropriate management.

It is a privilege to be able to see habitats on private land and exciting when we find lovely meadows and/or unusual plants as we did at several sites as at Llandogo, Gwehelog, Llanvihangel-ystern-llewern, Llanover and Cwmyoy. Several of the meadows at these places easily reach the criteria for designation as Local Wildlife Sites. Two sites I re-visited, on Lydart and at Pen y Fan near The Narth, are also now of Local Wildlife Site quality.

Every location has its own character and interest though and you never know what plants (or butterflies, other insects or fungi for that matter) may turn up. Butterflies have been plentiful this year and many members reported good numbers of Marbled Whites and Common Blues.

Of all the grassland types in Wales and indeed in Britain, limestone grassland has suffered the greatest

losses so it is encouraging that a community group has started at Caerwent, initiated by Stephen Smith, with the aim of restoring neglected fields on CADW land to flower-rich grassland. MMG has been giving advice on management.

Roger Ruston has been out on members' land and at our reserves looking for bees, wasps and flies. He has made some remarkable discoveries and found Brown-banded Carder Bees again at Kingcoed Meadows as well as Long-horned Bees, though fewer than in 2019.

At my own steep pasture at Penallt he found the first record for Wales of the Downland Villa *Villa unguolata*, a bee fly found mainly on limestone in Gloucestershire. It had been seen on the Doward and then turned up in August at Penallt across the border.

A week or so later Roger found another Downland Villa at our Wet Meadow Reserve. Karen Wilkinson when visiting my pasture on behalf of NRW heard numerous Roesel's Bush Crickets. Sadly my hearing is not what it was and I wasn't able to hear them. There were several records too of this cricket elsewhere as at a site on The Narth.

Steph Tyler

Welcome to our New Members

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

Nick Beaugié and Helen Beardsell, Tintern
Kiloran Buckler, Llanthony
Kate Collwell, Stroud
Caroline Dashwood, Cwmyoy
Gareth Edwards, Aust
Christopher Guinness, Gwehelog
Carol Hancock, Llandenny

Elizabeth Murray, Llanover
Mary Neal, Trostrey
David Rooke and Ruth Pickvance, Cwmyoy
Mathew and Alison Smith, Mamhilad
Gerard Thomas, Lanvihangel-ystern-llewern
Tessa Turner, Llanddewi Rhydderch

Our membership subscription is based on a rolling year, with reminders being sent out in spring and autumn to members who pay annually rather than by standing order. We rely on memberships and donations to fund the administration of the group, and we are very grateful to all our members for their continued support. If you haven't received a reminder but think you may be in arrears, please contact Marilyn on 01600 860031 or marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk

Thank you!

Grassland Fungi: A Field Guide, Second Edition

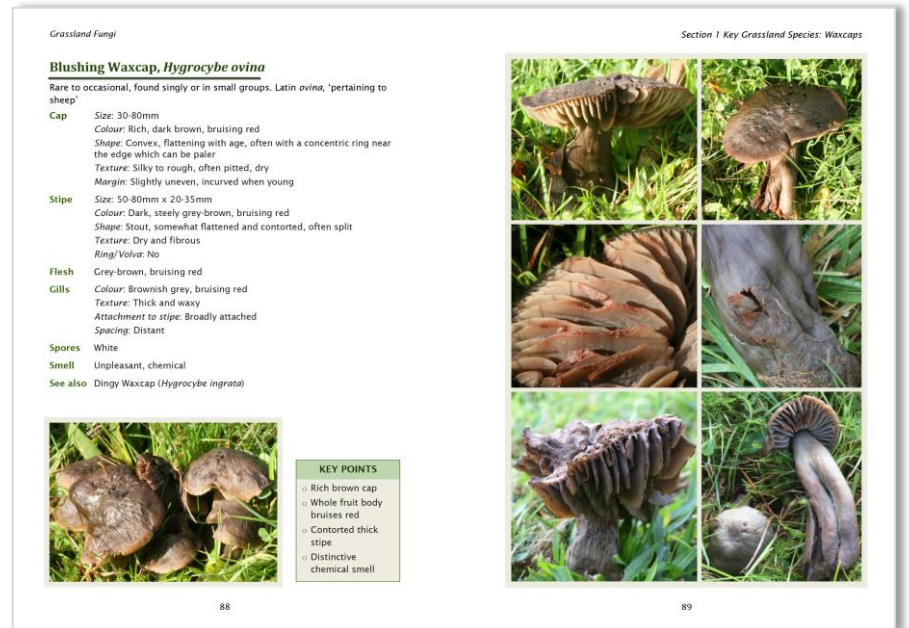
The first edition of *Grassland Fungi: A Field Guide*, published by MMG in 2017, has been a great success and has sold out. Since its publication, Elsa Wood and Jon Dunkelman have continued to survey grasslands in the Wye Valley and Monmouthshire, photographing and recording their finds. This new edition includes the results of that extra research, with 23 new species and many new and even better photographs to help identification.

This edition has descriptions of 200 species of fungi, with over 900 photographs, selected to illustrate the key identification points. There is an overview of the process of identifying fungi in the field. Technical terms are kept to a minimum, and those used are explained in the glossary. The format is A5, and there are now 400 pages.

Reviewing the first edition in the magazine *British Wildlife*, Peter Mullen said of the book:

"It is clear, not too technical and very well illustrated with colour images. It will be a boon to any field worker...This is a well produced and much needed guide to grassland fungi that should be useful to beginners as well as more experienced field mycologists."

The book can be purchased from the distributors NHBS on www.nhbs.com for a retail price of £19.99 and will be available from the MMG stall at future events.



MMG Annual General Meeting

Online via Zoom, 7.30pm on Tuesday 20th October

As our usual spring AGM was cancelled, a virtual meeting will be held in place of our Autumn social this year. The agenda will include a short report on MMG's activities and financial position, voting on the proposal to convert to a CIO* and the required elections to the Committee.

The formal part of the meeting will be followed by a Question and Answer session in which our panel will answer members' questions about managing their meadows, MMG's work or any other relevant topic. If possible, we would appreciate questions in advance, please, to Marilyn. It would be helpful, also, if comments about the matters on the agenda could be sent in advance, in particular about the CIO. However, there will also be an opportunity to comment and ask questions during the meeting.

Advance booking is not essential as a link will be sent to all member before the meeting, and it would be helpful if you would let us know if you intend to join the meeting to give an indication of numbers. Contact Marilyn marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk, 01600 860031.

Marilyn can also help if you have any questions about how the Zoom meeting will work.

*The proposal is to accept the Committee's recommendation to convert MMG to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). The proposed new constitution and an explanation of the Committee's recommendation can be seen on the MMG web site.

Wildflower Seed for Meadows

Steph Tyler

If you are thinking of buying meadow seed there is a bewildering number of seed companies vying for your attention online. It was easy when we had good supplies of seed collected with our seed harvester, jointly owned by Gwent Wildlife Trust, but this year for various reasons, we have none.

The company PlantWild, originally based in Leominster, was also a good choice because they harvested seed locally including from some of our own members' meadows. Sadly, the company was sold and the new owners are based in Cambridgeshire so the seed is no longer of local provenance.

I have been looking at some of the seed companies and the meadow seed that they sell and in general I have been disappointed at the list of species in the meadow mixes. Many include annuals such as Common Poppies, Corn Marigolds, Cornflowers and Borage which will provide colour for the first year. That is fine as they are arable plants and will disappear as other species become established.

However, the seed for many lowland meadow mixes contains that of species that should

only occur on lime-rich soils such as Salad Burnet and Wild Carrot, or species that need wet conditions such as Ragged Robin which is a lovely native marsh-loving plant. Many meadow mixes often contain seed of Red and White Campions which are not really meadow species but hedgerow edge and waste ground species respectively. In any case White Champion does not occur commonly in Monmouthshire. The species of grass seed provided in many meadow mixes are also dubious and most are not found naturally in lowland meadows in Monmouthshire.

One meadow mix that I can recommend is the Welsh Meadow mix sold by Habitat Aid (see below). Every species that is listed in this mix (harvested in Pembrokeshire) occurs in most meadows in Monmouthshire on neutral to slightly acidic soils. Unfortunately, this is more expensive than some other less recommended mixes.

Perhaps I am too much of a purist but I do feel that we should sow seed of species that should be in our meadows rather than more 'exotic' species. In the end maybe species that would not be well adapted to our soil will die out so does it matter? For a plant recorder interested in the distribution of native and archaeophyte species (archaeophytes are species that have been in Britain for 500+ years), I believe it does.

Finally, do you really need to buy seed? If you have bare ground then perhaps you do if no source of green hay is available. However, if you have grassland already, its correct management should mean that in time other species will become established. You have to be patient! If you can't wait, then why not collect some Yellow Rattle pods, some Knapweed heads and other seed in mid-July from a nearby good quality meadow and scatter this in your grassland?

Steph Tyler

Habitat Aid promotes and sells British native plants and trees, and provides advice and ecological consultancy services. Half of their profits are donated to environmental charities for projects that promote biodiversity and conservation. Their subsidiary companies, British Wildflower Seeds and British Pond Plants, sell smaller quantities of seeds all obtained from specialist small scale harvesters and growers around the UK.



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BRITISH
WILDFLOWER
SEEDS

www.habitataid.co.uk

www.britishpondplants.co.uk

www.britishwildflowermeadowseeds.co.uk



A true meadow mix – MMG's reserve at Kingcoed (picture Rachel Morgan)

Autumn Snippets from Wet Meadow

Dick Coates

With the extraordinary spring weather, with all its north winds, our spectacular annual display of Heath and Common Spotted-orchids was pitiful, in contrast to New Grove Meadows where the earlier Green-winged Orchid has never done better. Wet Meadow Bird's-foot Trefoil doubled its territory. Today the Harebells in the Brewery Paddock are abundant in the south-east top corner



The hay cutting was delayed from the usual 14th July to 1st August. Then a further delay was requested for the bees on the Knapweed. The final date was 7th August after an inspection by Steph. Within an hour of starting a Red Kite appeared, rarely seen the rest of the year. The resident Buzzard was there too, looking rather bored. It didn't even bother to move from its bale when I approached with a camera.



Loading Hay with 1940's Forklift

We asked Jack to leave a 3m margin where there was no bracken so about 16 acres were gathered in out of the total 24 acres, thus leaving sanctuary areas.

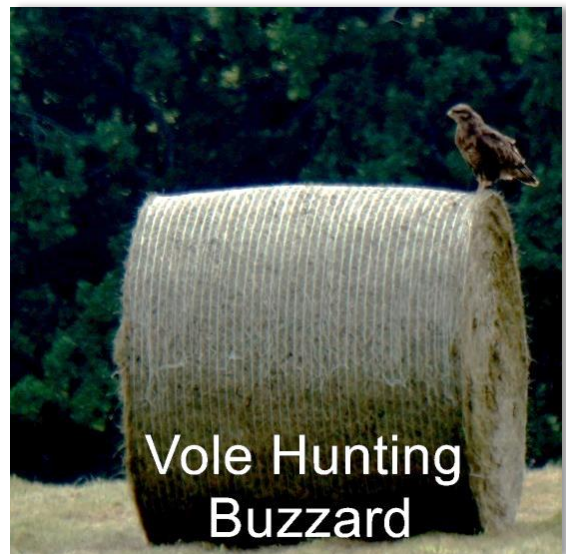
September has its own treats with the fresh purity of air, the heavy dew leaving a super abundance of sparkling cobwebs, the flocks of swallow acrobats diving and swerving barely 10cm from the ground. The woods are still, with only gentle pecker tapping and distant cooing of pigeons, but full of fungi.



Isca in Harebells

The meadow has delivered a rich picking of field mushrooms for the first time this year accompanied by fairy rings.

Hopefully the waxcaps will join us next month, but the badgers have already started ploughing up the pasture.



Vole Hunting Buzzard



Fuel stop for hungry Comma

Botanists ‘Go Hemlock’

Carol Cook

Yes, ‘going hemlock’ became a ‘thing’ in June this year. It was a light-hearted response referring to botanists explaining that the ‘wildflowers’ in a colourful display on a roundabout in Musselburgh, Scotland, were in fact not native wildflowers, and that this mattered.

The photo posted on Twitter, sparked impassioned debate, with one well-known naturalist tweeting ‘every council across the UK should aspire to this’. The hashtag #angrybotanists was soon trending and emboldened tweets of ‘purists’ and



The picture that started the debate: Source, Edinburgh Spotlight

were levelled at botanists who dared to suggest that we might need to pause and rethink the mass planting of often imported wildflower seeds, and concentrate on promoting the UK’s own native wildflowers.

Many congratulated the local authority responsible, East Lothian. It was a spectacularly colourful display. Others tagged their own local authorities asking for the same and photos of colourful roadside verges and roundabouts around the country were widely shared. But botanists persisted, keen to point out that these perennial species originate from the plethora of wildflower mix seed packets, now widely available to purchase.

The voice of reason and experience, BSBI Society, entered the discussion, providing evidenced discussion about the pros and cons of packet wildflower seeds; we’ll let you decide your own thoughts on this important topic. You can read BSBI’s blog here bsbi.org/wildflower-seed-sowing-pros-and-cons.

Another informative article can be found on Plantlife’s website www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/campaigning-change/keeping-wild-wildflower.

*Council planting in Gloucestershire
cc-by-sa/2.0 - © Jonathan Billinger
geograph.org.uk/p/3586283*

The UK has lost most of its native wildflower meadows, it’s why we do what we do at Monmouthshire Meadows. We encourage the use of seeds of local provenance and follow the advice of our highly-skilled and experienced botanists, Steph Tyler, Elsa Wood and Sheelagh Kerry.

We asked Steph for a comment on this issue. Steph advises that ‘cornfield annuals and exotic species are fine in a garden setting or on urban roundabouts but they are not suitable for scattering in the countryside and are in no way a substitute for a proper wildflower meadow with native perennials and associated insects.’ (See also Steph Tyler’s article on *Wildflower Seed for Meadows* elsewhere in this newsletter).

Despite the furore, this picture sparked a much-needed debate and will hopefully see the continuation of excellent local authority partnerships with wildflower/wildlife experts. Even BBC Springwatch included wildflowers this year. For those of us in Wales, Iolo Williams produced this beautiful five minute video on wildflowers in this country, their history and their importance to wildlife:

www.facebook.com/BBCSpringwatch/videos/3084883011590379.

We need more wildflower areas, but that does not always mean the need for packet wildflower seed. Perhaps, as I’ve discovered with the wildflower meadow where I live, leave nature to do her thing because the seeds are there, we just need to be patient and let them grow.



Members' Meadows

In June we published a 'virtual open day' on the MMG web site, and we asked for more pictures for this newsletter. The response has been terrific and we have too many to fit them all in, so here is a selection. Together they demonstrate the wide variety of different types of wildflower grassland managed by our members, from small back gardens and old orchards to large farms with traditionally managed meadows.



Brian and Shelagh Bocking's meadow

Brian and Shelagh Bocking sent a picture of one of their small meadows in St Briavels, taken in June, showing their orchids, Red Clover and other plants (above).

Carol Cook near The Narth asked @wildflowerhour on Twitter to identify this lovely Bush Vetch (below), the first time it has been seen in her meadow. Carol says she was confused at first as she thought the flowers of this species are purple, but learned they can occasionally be pink.

Harriet Challis contacted us in April for advice on encouraging wildflowers at her cottage near Llansoy. When they bought the site in 2012 the grounds had been neglected for many years, the trees were shrouded by brambles and bracken and the undergrowth was impenetrable. On clearing the area they discovered a well-established orchard. With a management plan in place for the fruit trees, the focus is now on restoring the wildflower meadow below. Removing the brambles has revealed many welcome plants, such as Celandine, Bluebells, Cow Parsley, Primroses, Lords and Ladies, ferns and dandelions, but some less welcome ones too - Ground Elder, and copious thistles and docks. The photo Harriet sent (below) is of the orchard from spring 2020. The aim now is to preserve the indigenous plants and flowers that are so lovely while controlling the 'brutes' that wish to smother them. We look forward to hearing how they get on



Left: Carol Cook's Bush Vetch

Below: Harriet Challis' old orchard revealed



Jules and Dave Barrell reported finding two new species at their farm near The Hendre – a stand of Betony in one of their fields and some Common Centaury in the orchard.

Martin & Patricia Milling were due to host one of our Open Meadows this spring, at their home in Far Hill, Llanishen. Sadly that was not to be, but they did send in some photographs. Their Common Dog Violets and Cowslips apparently put on an amazing show this year. We look forward to a future visit to their meadows.

John Hinderer sent in pictures of his land near Tintern, in the Angidy Valley, where later he also found native Goldenrod.

Cathie Holland & Phil Bryan in Trellech don't have a field, but do have a front and back lawn. Over the last few years they have been developing sections as mini meadows, helped by Yellow Rattle seed from MMG. Their pictures demonstrate what can be achieved with just a small garden area.

Below, top row: Goldenrod flowers and a view of John Hinderer's meadows in the Angidy Valley

Bottom row: Cathie Holland's back garden mini-meadow, and the Yellow Rattle which has helped it along

Right: Jules and Dave's Betony

Below: Martin and Patricia's spring display with Cowslips and Dog Violets



Pam and Peter Lloyd at New Grove Farm already have some beautiful meadows adjacent to the Gwent Wildlife Trust reserve near Trellech. This spring they decided they would not cut the area around their pond and it has resulted in a wonderful display of Ox-eye Daisy and grasses.

Robert and Marie Everett at St Maughans say that orchids started to appear about five years ago in a scrubby bank in their garden. They have increased year on year and this year there are about twenty.

Sue Weston sent in several pictures of their beautiful wild flower meadow at Llanvihangel ystern-llewern, where Sue runs mindfulness and T'ai-Chi courses.

Rhian Flew-Williams shared some photographs of her front garden meadow in Penallt, including the one below. Rhian says that in spring "it was the biggest bird table you have ever seen! The birds swoop onto the grass heads to get to the seeds. They hang on no matter how bendy the grass stem becomes!"



Top right: Pam and Peter's pond at New Grove Farm



Middle right: Common Spotted-orchids in Marie and Robert's garden

Bottom right: Buttercups and Hogweed in Sue Weston's flower meadow



Below: Rhian and Alastair's garden meadow in Penallt





Steve Davis is keeping a photographic record of the wild flowers in his garden and paddock. Here are a few taken on the uncultivated banks bordering the garden

Steve's pictures above

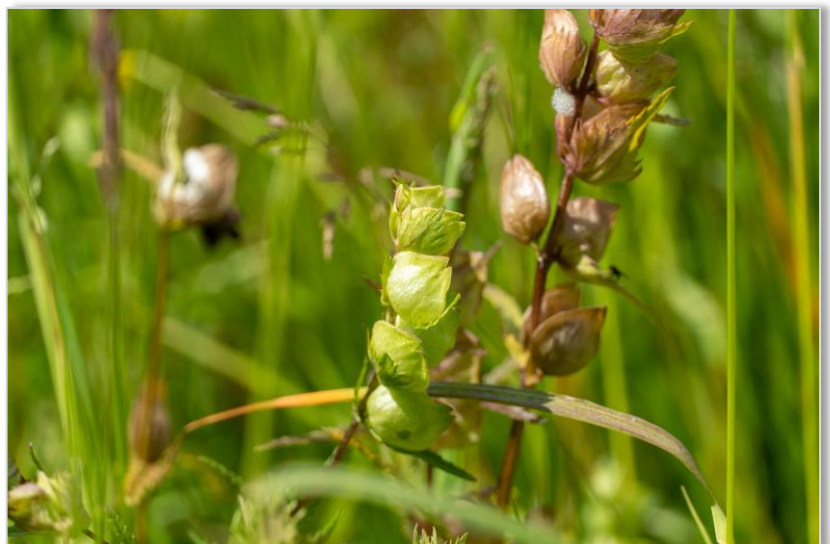
Top left: Field Rose and Honeysuckle

Top right: Common Centaury

Bottom right: Selfheal and Common Mouse-ear



Gary Smith took these photographs of Yellow Rattle seeding at Pentwyn Farm, Gwent Wildlife Trust's reserve in Penallt (below), and Common Spotted-orchid at Wyeswood Common (left)



A Virtual Tour of Trengrove Gardens

Guin Vaughan of Trengrove House near Abergavenny was due to take part in the National Garden Scheme in June, but this year things did not go to plan. Guin explains:

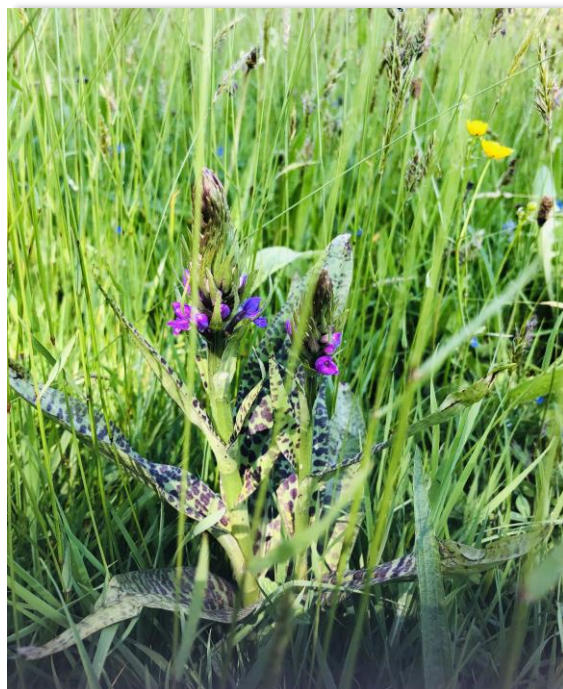
“In response to a fundraising initiative by the National Garden Scheme in June, when we thought we would be unable to open the gardens to the public, I made a Virtual Tour of the garden here at Trengrove including a bit about the meadow. NGS put these Tours up on YouTube and I've since been amazed to find my tour has had over 22,000 views! I'm hoping some of those people also donated to the NGS charities.

“In the end we did open by appointment on four days in July and had 225 visitors.

“We had a one-way system which took visitors around the edge of the meadow so they could have a really close up experience of it and we had a display detailing species, insect life, management etc. People were really appreciative and interested and I hope we have inspired a few to make better use of their grassland.”

You can view Guin's garden tour, under [NGS gardens 2020 Trengrove House tour: throwing out the rule book](#) on YouTube.

Top and right: Orchids in Guin's meadow at Trengrove House



A Meadow or The Somme?

David Rooke is keeping a record of his latest project and will allow us to track his progress restoring his field.

David writes: “We didn't think very much about the impact of putting 1.6 kilometres of ground source heating pipes one metre below ground level in our meadow! This is what it looked like in June as the rock and soil was excavated in our field near to Cwmyoy. Remarkable pieces of stone emerged from the ground, some huge and others dressed perfectly by nature and ready for walling.

“The area of digging, about one acre of a five-acre field is now ready for reseeding with a meadow grass and wild flower mix. In previous years the ley had been 'improved' (as in sown with rye grass and fertilized) so it will be fascinating to see what the disturbance creates over the coming years. In the rest of the meadow we will be cutting late for hay and hope to see more diversity arrive in due course. Some thinner areas on the slope will be sown with Yellow Rattle.”



David's meadow project

Meadows, Tree Planting and Climate Change

Recent emphasis on planting trees in the effort to control runaway climate change is well publicised, and extremely important. However, the focus on tree planting has resulted in a tendency to convert any available land to woodland, even destroying increasingly rare wildflower-rich grasslands. The Woodland Trust warn against this, but just how do grasslands compare with tree planting in terms of carbon storage?

Recent research suggests that species-rich grasslands can be just as effective as woodlands in capturing and holding carbon. An article about the role of temperate grassland soils in controlling atmospheric CO₂ appeared in the Floodplain Meadows Partnership Newsletter in May, (www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk). Although the organisation focusses on floodplain meadows, the also article covers grasslands in general.

Drawing on a number of academic sources, the article reaches some interesting conclusions.

The amount of carbon in soil is several times larger than that in the atmosphere, and there is scope for soil to store even more. The research referred to in the article shows that established grasslands have a large underground store of humus, and a root biomass 4 to 7 times bigger than that of trees. In addition, because the deep root system in grasslands occupies a large volume of the soil, it provides a more even distribution of carbon underground, compared to restored woodlands. The more diverse the species mix, the more efficiently the root systems occupy the space, utilising more of the soil for carbon storage. Undisturbed, species-rich grasslands can sustain a higher rate of soil carbon sequestration than arable fields or forests.

Converting grassland to woodland shows little increased benefit in capturing carbon and can have an adverse impact on soil carbon sequestration rates. It is true that short term tree planting is good for above-ground carbon storage, as young trees store carbon in their structure, and this can play an important role in combating climate change. But this is only an overall gain if, when the tree is felled, the wood is used for something that lasts (e.g. furniture or buildings), otherwise the carbon it holds can be re-released into the atmosphere. Wood is not a good store of

carbon, especially compared to peat or humus, because rotting wood emits carbon and methane, while peat and humus retain their carbon very effectively.

But even the act of planting trees releases stored carbon through soil disturbance. Then, with time, the trees gradually shade out the grass, causing the roots to die and more of the stored carbon to be released.

The conclusion is that, for long-term carbon storage, trees should not be planted into existing permanent grassland, and to achieve a decrease in atmospheric CO₂:

- 1) Conservation of peat soils is the top priority
- 2) Conservation of established low-input, species-rich grasslands is a key secondary goal
- 3) Trees planted on woodland clearances and wastelands in urban areas will provide a carbon sink from the atmosphere, but established vegetation and their soils should not be disturbed by tree planting
- 4) Grassland restoration provides a long-lasting solution for carbon storage in the soil
- 5) Floodplain meadows, in particular, are a perfect store for soil carbon, and should be conserved and restored

The Woodland Trust has a good practice guide: www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/plant-trees/advice/where

Reference: Soil Carbon: Where do floodplain meadows sit in the debate? Floodplain Meadows Partnership Spring 2020 Newsletter, The Open University
www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk/news/newsletters

With thanks to Teona Dorrien-Smith for forwarding the article



Wysewood Common, Penallt (photo: Gary Smith)

Micro-Managing our Meadows

Jon Dunkelman

Here at The Beeches we have six acres of meadows which we manage as best we can for wildlife. We moved here in 2011 and for two years we relied on contractors to cut and bale the hay. But after two very wet seasons when the contractors came late, because they had to prioritise their larger customers, and after seeing how much damage their heavy machinery can do to wet land, we decided to buy a small tractor to cut the fields ourselves.

It's hard work, especially raking and collecting after the cut, so it's not for everyone, but as well as giving us more certainty it has one other big advantage: we can micro-manage the cutting. We carefully select when to cut and which areas to cut first, leaving some flowers and grasses to grow and seed for as long as possible. Because we have a lot to do, we have to start in the second half of July to finish by mid-September (as this year, there's always time lost because of the weather). On average each of the four fields receives five or six cuts. It's a case of a bit every day, whenever the weather allows, but starting with less flower-rich areas and those which have mostly finished seeding.

If possible, cuttings are left for a day or two to help with seed dispersal, before collecting and removing (dependent on the weather forecast).

The hardest bit is clearing of course. We don't have a baler so we rake everything into piles which we load into our trailer and tip on some large compost heaps at the bottom of the hill (so run-off doesn't leach into the meadow). That provides more habitat too (Slow Worms love it, and we found our first Grass Snake this summer). The heaps start off huge but tend to rot down, so they are just small mounds by the time we start to build them up again.

It's inevitable some flowering plants will be cut down, but this way we make sure we do minimum damage, and leave plenty of flowers for the later insects. Marbled Whites tend to disappear before August and their larvae are at ground level by early August, so cutting from mid-August works for them. Some longer grass is left around the edges for invertebrate larvae.

We also find it is a way of avoiding too many casualties – the small creatures that can be hurt or killed as a side effect of harvesting. They usually have an opportunity to head into the uncut areas. Checking for hedgehogs before cutting or strimming is essential, and just walking the area to scuttle anything else before starting. This approach does much less harm than the sledgehammer single-cut-with-large-machinery way.

We've had great results, with increasing numbers and diversity of species each year. In general, it seems when specific flowers are just given that extra advantage they make the most of it. When we first found a particular Eyebright hybrid that was hanging on in one field there were just six plants. Five years later there are more hundreds than we can count. Orchids, too, have benefitted from being left to complete their annual cycle – in 2013 we had 11 orchids, this year 312.

One last advantage of working the fields over a couple of months is that you get to see the wildlife close up. You see much more when you are working in the fields as opposed to sitting with binoculars in hand!

Jon Dunkelman

Everyone finds their own approach to managing their meadows, that suits them best. We would like to hear from members how they manage their land, and overcome the problems we all face when it comes to cutting and clearing.



Our Goldoni tractor with tedder attached, perfect for slopes and small areas of land

Night-Flying Moths as Pollinators

A study published recently in the Royal Society's journal *Biology Letters*, suggests that the role of night-flying moths in pollinating wild plants may have been greatly underestimated.

The researchers noticed that the amount of pollen carried by these moths was significantly more than previously believed, partly because they carry more on the underside of their body rather than around their mouths where pollen had been taken from in previous studies. In addition, while each insect cannot carry as much pollen as a honeybee or bumblebee, they are present in high numbers, cover wider areas and are more general in the plants they visit rather than targeting the most pollen rich.

The authors conclude that these nocturnal insects could well provide a vital component of the pollinating network in agricultural areas, and the severe decline in their numbers highlights the need to include them in future management and conservation plans.

Ref: Walton Richard E., Sayer Carl D., Bennion Helen and Axmacher Jan C. 2020 Nocturnal pollinators strongly contribute to pollen transport of wild flowers in an agricultural landscape Biology Letters volume 16 issue 5 20190877 <http://doi.org/10.1098/rsbl.2019.0877>



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[Green_Carpet_Moth_\(4660557305\).jpg](#)

Scything Courses

A few members have asked about scything courses recently, so here are two organisations that we know about. Most courses are over for this year and, of course, have been restricted by the Covid19 regulations, but will hopefully be up and running again in 2021.

Scythe Cymru: A fair distance as they are based at the Dyfed Permaculture Farm Trust in west Carmarthenshire (about 80 miles west of Abergavenny), but their courses have been recommended by MMG members. They offer a number of options, starting at a one-day introductory course (this year's price £70 including lunch, with concessions for low-waged and young people). Other courses include looking after your equipment, and 'immersion' weekends. They also sell scythes and related equipment such as traditional wooden hay rakes, and run a scythe maintenance service. Contact details and full information on www.scythecymru.co.uk

Wild Meadow: Based in Presteigne, about 42 miles north of Monmouth, the owners of this site in the beautiful Radnorshire countryside have a holiday cottage and also offer group or one-to-one scything courses for beginners and improvers. The basic one-day course with tutor Andrea Gilpin is £55 but you have to take your own lunch.
www.wildmeadow.co/scything-classes

Details of other scything courses and events can be found on the national Scythe Association's web site www.scytheassociation.org

Monmouth: Bee Town

Sadly, the Bee Festival had to be cancelled this year, but there was a good amount of national publicity for the naming of Monmouth as the first official Bee Town in the UK, endorsed by the County Council and Monmouth Town Council, and thanks to a campaign led by Bees for Development. The same team started the town's Nature Isn't Neat campaign which is now being rolled out to other communities in Gwent (funded through the Welsh Government Rural Communities under the LEADER measure of the Rural Development Programme). Congratulations to everyone involved for a successful campaign.

Accrediting Bee-Friendly Flowers

The National Botanic Garden of Wales has launched a Saving Pollinators Assurance Scheme, producing a logo to be displayed by growers and nurseries by plants that are guaranteed to be pollinator friendly.

Rather than relying on untested claims by the sellers, the logo is awarded to growers and nurseries signed up to the scheme, and is based on scientific research at the Botanic Garden, where DNA barcoding* has been used to investigate which plants bees and hoverflies actually visit. People shopping at these nurseries are guaranteed that the plants where the logo is displayed are loved by bees and other pollinating insects, don't contain synthetic insecticides and are grown in peat-free compost. According to the Botanic Garden, "It is the only pollinator plant logo in the



marketplace that is backed up by science and the only one that assures buyers they have made an environmentally sustainable choice."

Information on the National Botanic Garden web site www.botanicgarden.wales

*DNA barcoding is the practice of using short sections of DNA, in this case taken from the bodies of pollinators, to identify plant species.

Monmouthshire's Selective Mowing Policy

Monmouthshire gained a mention in this year's Springwatch for its selective mowing programme, designed to leave more wildflower areas in verges, parks and other public places. This is great progress, following some years of campaigning by, among others, Plantlife, MMG and Bee Friendly Monmouthshire, and the public recognition will hopefully encourage the Council to expand and extend its selective mowing policy. They point to the difficulties of the change in practice, when their fleet of mowers is not designed to manage grassland in this way, and the problem of disposing of the grass cuttings has not been fully resolved. Nevertheless, while there's still a way to go, it's good to see the county starting to deliver on their good intentions. Well done to everyone who helped promote this change, and especially our friends in Bee Friendly Monmouthshire and Nature Isn't Neat.

The Council's statement on this policy is on their web site

Metaldehyde Ban

Some more good news: the outdoor use of metaldehyde, the chemical most frequently used in slug pellets, is to be banned from March 2022. Metaldehyde is known to be poisonous to other wildlife, particularly hedgehogs but also toads, insects and family pets. Its prohibition has long been a target of environmentalists. A ban was first announced two years ago, by the then-Defra Secretary Michael Gove, but that decision was reversed following a legal challenge. Here's hoping this time it will be gone for good.

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



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