

# Monmouthshire Meadows

Issue 34

Registered Charity No. 1192542

Spring 2021

## Conserving and Restoring Wildflower-rich Grasslands in Monmouthshire

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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](mailto: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

Other contact details 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](http://www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk)

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[@MonMeadows](https://twitter.com/MonMeadows)



### From the Chair

Rachel Morgan

Some really good news in this dreary winter is the awarding of an MBE to our illustrious President and erstwhile Chair Steph Tyler for services to nature conservation in the UK and Africa. Congratulations Steph!

A year ago we had hardly heard of Covid, and now many are suffering, but one beneficiary is the flora and thus fauna. Cost cutting exercises by councils have led to reduced mowing. In particular, in Monmouthshire you can read about how this is boosting the Nature isn't Neat movement on page eight. Let us hope that the new cut and collect mowers become the norm nationwide. Conversely it is a scandal that the Government threatens more destruction with its volte face on Neonicotinoids.

Our reserves have not been neglected. Again we have had the Texels grazing at Wet Meadow, where work parties have been continuing when the rules allowed. Grants from Trellech United Community Council and the Welsh Church Fund have been used to replace the wicket gate into the forest land, put new fencing and gate on the roadside (thanks to Monmouthshire County Council for the gate), and to put up some board walk bridges over ditches. All work done at Wet Meadow is in collaboration with Gwent Wildlife Trust.

At Ida's Meadow near The Narth, again, as with many small parcels of land, we had problems getting rid of the hay. Owain Rees was able to sort it in mid-September. Our Kingcoed reserve was again grazed by Eifion's Welsh mountain sheep.



Wet Meadow in the January snow (Dick Coates)



Jacynth and Jemima, our two Exmoor Ponies, are looking forward to going to their summer residence near Tintern. We extend extra special thanks to Alan Poulter who, in his work of looking after the ponies, managed to lose the top of his finger in November. Luckily the missing part was taken with him to hospital and successfully re-attached

Our Autumn social this year was virtual and included the AGM. Members voted unanimously to transform the charity into a CIO (Charitable Incorporated Organisation) and on 26<sup>th</sup> November this was made official. Apart from a new charity number (1192542) there seems to be no difference except a new, more robust constitution. At the same meeting we said goodbye to one of our longest serving trustees, Sheelagh Kerry. Sheelagh has been with us for ten years. She will continue to carry out surveys for the Group. Carol Cook has been our efficient secretary for the last couple of years but must leave as she is moving to France (or will be after lockdown!). We look forward to receiving pictures of her beautiful French meadows. What an idyllic thought - French wine, cheese and bread on a rug in a French meadow. Many thanks to both Sheelagh and Carol for their work and support. We also welcome new trustee, Clare Catto. Clare lives in Mitchel Troy and some of you may already know her as chair of Monmouth 'Our Green Spaces' group.

We hope to be able to see people in person in the summer but in the meantime, we will go ahead with our Spring meet and AGM on Zoom on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> April at 7pm. We are pleased to be able to welcome Sean Cole who will talk about orchids. He is co-author of the field guide *Britain's Orchids*. What a shame he will not be able to do a signing. But perhaps we can persuade him to come and do one at our open day on 13<sup>th</sup> June. We hope by then we can meet, at least outside. See page three for more details. Despite not being able to meet at all in 2020 we had a pleasing number of new members (page six). Once again Marilyn has put together a full and interesting newsletter. I love especially seeing pictures and reading about members' meadows. As a group we all face similar challenges and rewards in managing them. See in particular pages 10-15.



*Rachel Morgan*

*Top right: Steph Tyler and David Llewellyn with the Trakmaster at a Wet Meadow work party (Carol Cook)*

*Below and right: Wet Meadow: new entrance gate, fencing, kissing gate and bridge (Dick Coates, Rachel Morgan)*





## Open Meadows in 2021

At the time of writing, we do not yet know if we will be able to hold our usual Open Meadows this year, but we are planning optimistically for visits on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> June and Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> June.

On 13<sup>th</sup> June, we hope to be visiting members in the Llanishen/Trellech area. There will be a booking system, with guided walks at specific times between 11am and 4pm. This is partly because parking at these sites is limited, and partly to cope with any Covid19 regulations that might be in place.

More detailed information, including directions, will be sent to members nearer the time and posted on the MMG web site.

As always, we are very grateful to our hosts:

- David Hathaway at Trewen, Llanishen;
- Martin and Patricia Milling at Blue Door, Far Hill; and
- Justine and David Scouller at Elm Farm, Far Hill.

On Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> we shall spend an afternoon at Llanllowell House near Usk, with our host Hamish Sandison. Hamish has welcomed us before to his beautiful spot, in 2017. There are two lovely hay meadows, an orchard and a stretch of woodland running alongside a stream called Llewellyn's Dingle. A footpath takes you up to the Gwent Wildlife Trust reserve at Springdale Farm.



*Llanllowell House in the sunshine: Biodiversity Day in 2017*

## MMG AGM & Spring Social

With a talk on Orchids by Sean Cole

**Online via Zoom, 7pm on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> April**

While we cannot get together for our usual buffet supper evening, we can meet virtually for our Annual General Meeting and a talk by Sean Cole, joint author of the highly regarded *Britain's Orchids: A Field Guide to the Orchids of Great Britain and Ireland*, published by the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland.

Sean's talk will include some fascinating facts about how different varieties of orchid employ various pollination techniques, and tips for identification when the plants are not flowering, as well as some stunning photographs.

There is no charge for the event, and non-members are welcome to attend. Please book in advance using the form on our web site or contact Marilyn

[marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk](mailto:marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk), 01600 860031. A link will be sent out near the time.



*Green-winged Orchid at New Grove Meadows (Keith Moseley)*

## Day-Flying Moths in your Meadow

Wendy Tyler-Batt

One of the delights of a wildflower meadow is the wonderful habitat it provides for a wide range of invertebrates among which are the day-flying moths. As the title suggests, these moths buck the trend of flying at night, and indeed the larger ones are easily mistaken for butterflies. Just to confuse, some of the nocturnal fliers are easily disturbed from vegetation during the day and other species fly both by day and night. As far as the 'what's the difference between a moth and a butterfly' goes, moths generally have feathery and not clubbed antennae, and most hold their wings horizontal when at rest; but there are exceptions.

Grasses, rushes, sedges and flowering plants in your meadow will provide food sources for both the larvae (caterpillars) and the adults. Some moth species rely on specific plants whilst others feed on several (polyphagous). Of course, the greater the number of plant species present, the greater diversity of moths your meadow will support.

Moths are pollinators and an important element of the food chain, being prey for birds, bats and insectivorous mammals. There are over 2,500 species of moths recorded in the UK of which approximately 200 may be readily seen during the day. Here are some examples that frequent our Monmouthshire meadows.

### Silver Y (*Autographa gamma*)

The name (like so many others for moths) describes the look! The metallic silver y-shaped mark on each forewing is diagnostic and this is one of the most commonly seen day-flying moths from May to September. But it is also an immigrant so can turn up in any month of the year. Often seen energetically flying from flower to flower and easily disturbed from vegetation. It also flies at night. The larvae are polyphagous.

### Six-spot Burnet (*Zygaena filipendulae*)

A very distinctive glossy black moth with six red spots on each wing, whose warning colours indicate it is



Silver Y (photo Ryszard Szczygiel)



Six-spot Burnet with cocoon (Bob Eade)



Burnett Companion (Wendy Tyler-Batt)



Mother Shipton (Wendy Tyler-Batt)



poisonous to potential predators. The Six-spot Burnet is the commonest of our burnet moths, emerging between June and August from papery cocoons attached halfway up grass stems. They have a heavy and direct flight and can be seen on sunny and warm days. The adults feed on the nectar of knapweed and thistles, whilst the larval food plants are both Bird's-foot Trefoils. The two red spots closest to the head are often difficult to separate but with a 'head spot(s) plus four other spots' may be readily distinguished from the Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet with 'head spot(s) plus three other spots'. Take care not to confuse with the day-flying Cinnabar which is also black but with a red stripe rather than spots, which favours more open habitats and has brightly coloured orange and black striped larvae which feed on Groundsel and Ragwort.

### **Mother Shipton (*Callistege mi*)**

A moth named after a sixteenth century woman variously described as a soothsayer or witch. The pattern on the forewings resembles the profile of a hag with hooked nose and conspicuous eye! Found in a range of open grassy places flying only in sunshine and favouring Ox-eye Daisy and Red Clover. I recorded this one at Kingcoed Meadows in May 2020.

### **Burnet Companion (*Euclidia glyphica*)**

I saw this one at Kingcoed Meadows on the same day and it is common in most meadows. Easily disturbed, it flies short distances on warm days, often with other species of moth.

The Mother Shipton and the Burnet Companion both fly from May to July and both have polyphagous larvae.

Conversely there are also two small drab and uncommon butterflies that may be mistaken for moths,

namely the Dingy and Grizzled Skippers, that have the same flight period as the Mother Shipton and Burnet Companion.

### **Speckled Yellow (*Pseudopanthera macularia*)**

The Speckled Yellow is on the wing by day from mid-May to late June. Similar in size to the preceding two species, with larvae feeding on Wood Sage, it prefers open woodland but is also found in scrub and bushy grassland. Always a delight to see, I recorded one locally on the Graig in May 2020.

### **Hummingbird Hawkmoth (*Macroglossum stellatarum*)**

A large and impressive moth that behaves just like the bird namesake darting from flower to flower, hovering with wings beating at 50-70 times per second producing an audible hum. The long proboscis completes the hummingbird resemblance. The larvae feed on bedstraw but as the moth cannot overwinter in the UK, its continued presence is dependent on an annual influx of immigrant adults from southern France. The moth favours flowers plentiful in nectar including honeysuckle and various garden flowers (one visited the *Viburnum bonariensis* in our garden last July).

### **Forester (*Adcita statices*)**

This metallic green day-flier frequents a range of habitats including grassland but there are not many records for Monmouthshire. The adults feed on Ragged Robin, Field and Devil's-bit Scabious and Viper's Bugloss, whilst the larval food plants are Common Sorrel and Sheep's Sorrel. Be sure to obtain a photo to confirm the identification.



Speckled Yellow (Photo Tamás Nestor)



Hummingbird Hawkmoth (Richard Tyler)

The large geometrid family of moths includes many with a slender butterfly-like appearance that are nocturnal fliers but easily disturbed by day. Examples commonly seen in meadows include several species of carpet moth (which refers to the wing pattern and not a carpet-eating habit!). And for those of us that struggle with Bracken, it does have some redeeming features, one of which is as the food plant for the Brown Silver-line moth larvae and from which the moth is easily disturbed during the day in May and June.

I haven't mentioned any of the smaller 'micro' moths that abound in meadows. They are harder to identify at first, requiring a hand lens in some cases, but it isn't difficult to get familiar with several of the more common species.

See the links below for more images, online resources and information on some indispensable field guides. Recording moths contributes to the monitoring of population trends as a result of positive and negative environmental factors and our hardworking County Recorder for Monmouthshire, Martin Anthoney, is always pleased to receive records (email [chemlep@btinternet.com](mailto:chemlep@btinternet.com)). If you have any doubt about an identification, please include a photo.



*Forester (Allan Drewitt)*



*Brown Silver-line (Lez Round)*

[ukmoths.org.uk](http://ukmoths.org.uk)

[www.field-studies-council.org/shop/publications/moths-guide](http://www.field-studies-council.org/shop/publications/moths-guide)

[www.nhbs.com/britains-day-flying-moths-book](http://www.nhbs.com/britains-day-flying-moths-book)

[www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlifehow-identify/moth-identification](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlifehow-identify/moth-identification)

[butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/leafletday-flying-moths-a5.pdf](http://butterfly-conservation.org/sites/default/files/leafletday-flying-moths-a5.pdf)

[gwentmothing.blogspot.com](http://gwentmothing.blogspot.com)

[www.nhbs.com/british-moths-book](http://www.nhbs.com/british-moths-book)

[www.nhbs.com/field-guide-to-the-moths-of-great-britain-and-ireland-book](http://www.nhbs.com/field-guide-to-the-moths-of-great-britain-and-ireland-book)

[www.nhbs.com/atlas-of-britain-and-irelands-larger-moths-book](http://www.nhbs.com/atlas-of-britain-and-irelands-larger-moths-book)

[richardtyler.zenfolio.com/f955763796](http://richardtyler.zenfolio.com/f955763796)

## Welcome to our New Members

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

Tracy Barrows, Penrhos

Tony Ella, Trellech

Dawn Harris, Great Manson

Ray Jones, Earlswood

Richard Linnell, Llansoy

Ben Morgan, Llanddewi Rhydderch

Dick Penny, Penallt

Sarah Prince, Parkhouse

Tim Stevenson, Trellech

Oliver Tomlinson, Knighton

Richard Wheatley, Crickhowell

Membership is on a rolling year basis, with reminders sent out twice a year, in March and September. If you have any queries about your membership, contact Marilyn Dunkelman, [marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk](mailto:marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk) or phone 01600 860031



### Monmouthshire Botany Group

Monmouthshire Botany Group formed about ten years ago to encourage and train botanists throughout Gwent (vc35 Monmouthshire). Joint co-ordinators Elsa Wood and Steph Tyler, arrange monthly walks for members to meet up, learn to identify new species and to record plants in various habitats and sites.

Membership is free and all with an interest in plants are welcomed. Meetings are great social events and everyone benefits from seeing new species or gaining new identification skills.

Proposed dates and venues of field meetings for 2021 (all provisional) are as follows:

- Saturday April 17<sup>th</sup> – Clytha, Usk
- Saturday May 15<sup>th</sup> – Silent Valley Reserve
- Saturday June 5<sup>th</sup> – Blaentrophy Meadows
- Saturday June 19<sup>th</sup> – Dyffryn, Bloreng Farm
- Saturday July 17<sup>th</sup> – Hendre Woods
- Saturday August 14<sup>th</sup> – Cwm Carn
- Wednesday 8th September – St Brides

To join the group contact Steph Tyler  
[steph\\_tyler2001@hotmail.com](mailto:steph_tyler2001@hotmail.com)

There is more information on the BSBI web site  
[bsbi.org/monmouthshire](http://bsbi.org/monmouthshire)

### Surveys and Local Wildlife Sites

Sheelagh, Elsa and I continued to visit some new members during the summer and autumn, one even in December, to carry out surveys and give advice on management. In all we visited 27 new members' land from Llanthony and Cwmyoy in the Black Mountains to fields in the Usk valley, on the Trellech plateau and along the Cas Troggi brook.

Several sites proved to be already flower-rich and met the criteria for Local Wildlife Sites and two that I re-visited had improved so much in terms of species diversity that they also merited LWS status. These were all approved at a recent virtual meeting of the Local Wildlife Site Advisory Panel.

*Steph Tyler*



*Two pictures from Sally Jones (see 'Twenty Years of Green Tape' on page 14)*

*Above: Heath Spotted Orchids and Red Clover among other species*

*Right: Common Knapweed and Meadow Vetchling among others*



## Monmouthshire County Council backs Nature Isn't Neat

Sue Parkinson

On March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020 the UK came to a shuddering halt as a national lockdown took effect to stop the spread of the then new and potentially deadly Covid 19 virus. It was a surreal time with suddenly quiet roads, clear blue con-trail free skies, and new skills to learn of home schooling children and juggling working from home with childcare. It was also a time of heightened concern and fear for vulnerable family members, sorrow and shock for those who lost loved ones or who were dealing with high numbers of ill and dying patients on a daily basis. The natural world became a source of comfort and solace just as the growing and nesting season began.

Within the grounds maintenance section at the County Council it was a challenging time. On top of staff shortages, there was confusion over whether mowing was an essential activity or not, balanced against the need to ensure safe spaces for exercise for physical and mental health. "Normal" mowing regimes ceased through March, April and May as we adapted to staff capacity and gained an understanding of what we should and could do, and what we were unable to do.

To help us put some structure around how to manage the situation, we significantly expanded the principles of the Nature Isn't Neat project turning vast areas of our open spaces into 'temporary' meadows.

Even with publicity about what we were doing and why, we expected to receive complaints from all directions. Interestingly though, many complaints were actually expressing disappointment that the grass had been cut, and concern for the wildlife using the long grass as a refuge. In June, Springwatch presenter Iolo Williams spoke about Monmouth being designated the UK's first Bee Town, crediting reductions in verge and green space mowing for supporting pollinator populations. Iolo suggested that other authorities should follow Monmouthshire's lead.

Many local people were delighted by the many species of wildlife, insects, birds and mammals that they enjoyed seeing as a result of the longer grass and extra flowering plants. These are some of the comments received:

*"I would like to express my appreciation of the more restrained cutting of the verges around Magor this spring and summer. I hope that this was not just because of Coronavirus. I have noticed an increase in insect life as some wild flowers and grasses have been left to grow"*

*"Belgrave Park has been a really interesting experiment this summer – watching the various latent wildflowers appearing has been fascinating. And with them, invertebrates and birdlife. I'm keeping a rough*



*Hedge Woundwort,  
Plantain and Yellow  
Rattle, Monmouth  
June 2020*



*Pyramidal Orchid  
group, Beech  
Road, June 2020*



*tally of what I've found. Thank you for altering the mowing regime. It makes the park so much more interesting, beautiful and useful."*

*"Changing the rules on the MCC mowing of grass verges is welcome but please also stop all weed killing in streets in towns. My house edge to street is currently like being in a village festooned with poppies and other flowers."*

*"I think the one thing we can all agree on, since the start of the pandemic, is how we've all been able to enjoy the wildlife we live around without them being disturbed by us outdoors with our constant need to mow and 'keep' large green spaces. The birds have been a lot louder for certain and I have a number of hedgehogs visiting my garden each night. I was hoping that the large public green in front of my house in Caldicot would be left to provide wild flowering plants and tall grasses for insects and small mammals to thrive in. Unfortunately, someone from the Council is here today cutting it. I would have been happy for this to remain as it was."*

As is always the case, you can't please all the people all of the time, and the Council did receive one or two negative comments, mainly related to untidiness and encouragement of rats.

Whilst our approach to mowing was generally well received, it did leave us with some challenges. The machines were designed to cut short grass and fly (leave the grass behind). Cutting long grass can clog the machines and leaves swathes of grass cuttings that smothers regrowth and adds nutrients to the soil. To enable us to take the Nature Isn't Neat approach further, we needed different types of mowers.

During the summer our MonLife Countryside colleagues successfully applied for Heritage Lottery funding to purchase new equipment to enable cutting and collecting longer grass, as well as creating materials that will explain the reasons behind this to the local people who use these green spaces. We hope that the public in our other towns will welcome the Nature Isn't Neat approach and appreciate the benefits that it brings in increasing biodiversity.

After a couple of years of running the Nature Isn't Neat project in Monmouth it was heartening to see a wide range of flowering plants popping up, especially to the south of the town – a good showing of Pyramidal Orchids beside the Beech Road slip road from the A40 as well as other unusual plants. Lots of Vetch, Trefoil,

Viper's Bugloss and Knapweed on the roadside near the Premier Inn and plenty of hay rattle in the old orchard opposite Overmonnow Garage.

If you are interested in getting involved with the extended Nature Isn't Neat Project throughout Monmouthshire we are looking for volunteers to help monitor pollinators and flowers on selected sites (special expertise is not needed), making monthly visits. We would love to hear from you, contact [NIN@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:NIN@monmouthshire.gov.uk).

We would also welcome feedback on the project via a public perception survey which is live now: [www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/nin](http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/nin)

*Sue Parkinson is the Green Infrastructure and Litter Education and Awareness Officer in the Waste & Street Services Department, Monmouthshire County Council*



*Monmouth NiN areas with mower and pickup, May 2020*

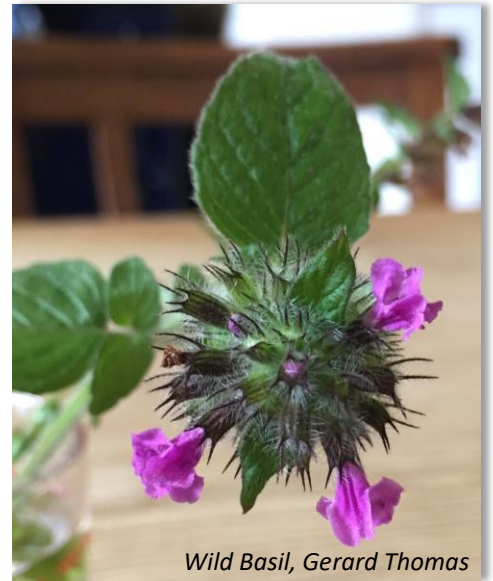


### First Sightings

Last July (but received just too late for the Autumn newsletter), Gerard Thomas sent pictures of some first sightings on his land at Lanvihangel-ystern-llewern. Wild Basil was growing close to their small pond and Musk Mallow in the hedgerow.

Elsewhere, not first sightings of the species, but the first sightings of Cowslips during October and Ragwort in December, from John Hinderer, who sent in pictures to prove his finds on his land near Tintern. John also found a few spindle bushes flowering while laying a hedge.

On the fungi front, Jon Dunkelman has been surveying the fields at The Beeches, on The North, which is rich in grassland species. Jon writes "It's been a brilliant year for Pinkgills here. They are an important and numerous group of grassland fungi and also difficult to identify, a bit like the Little Brown Jobs of the birding world. Here are three of the new species recorded here this year and these are easier to identify than some, as one is cream coloured, one is big and blue(ish) and one has a little bit of orange at the base of the stipe." (Jon's photographs are on the next page)



*Wild Basil, Gerard Thomas*



*Cowslips in October! John Hinderer*



*Oxford Ragwort taken 20<sup>th</sup>  
December, John Hinderer*



*Musk Mallow,  
Gerard Thomas*



*Spindle bush with flowers, John Hinderer*



## Hanbury Field, Caerleon

Bryan Dale is Director of Field Operations for Celf Caerleon Arts, a community organisation which has just completed a four-year project funded by the Landfill Tax Fund. Bryan writes:

“A few years ago, Celf Caerleon Arts secured a long lease on the Hanbury Field, where we hold our annual Festival. The aim was to turn a 1.5 acre field into a wildflower meadow. It is open to the public 24 hours, with a Sustrans Cyclepath through its length and it is a CADW Scheduled Monument, adjacent to the Roman Fortress. So we had to keep it open while introducing wild flowers, with no digging!

Stephanie Tyler surveyed the field for us and gave advice on how to start. We managed to get an Entrust Landfill Tax grant, and soon had a twice-yearly mowing

and baling programme underway. With help from our local schools, we took part in the Grow Wild project run by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, who supplied us with a number of their wonderful seed kits, and this produced hundreds of wildflower plugs which we planted all over the field. We also had the whole field chain harrowed and rolled while we hand sowed large amounts of seed, especially Yellow Rattle, and soon our field started to flourish.

With the help of our many volunteers, the field perimeter was cleared, trees pruned, fences replaced, walls mended, and rubble removed, so we could establish perennial wild flower borders, where before had been nettles, brambles and lots of litter.

*Continued on next page . . .*



*Fungi First Sightings at The Beeches*

*Left: Big Blue Pinkgill (Entoloma bloxamii)*

*Below left: Cream Pinkgill (Entoloma sericellum)*

*Below centre: Entoloma exile, which has no English name*

*Below right: the stipe of Entoloma exile showing the characteristic orange base*

*(Jon Dunkelman)*





## Hanbury Field, Caerleon, continued

*Aerial view of the Hanbury Field*



Our Entrust grant allowed us to spread sterilized top soil and then Wildflower Earth in the Spring of 2019 with impressive results in the Summer.

The Wildflower Earth is produced by the people who landscaped the London Olympics in 2012.

Now that all perennial beds are established, all we have to do is mow footpaths each Spring and mow the field each Summer - with horses when possible! Or by hand if necessary

In 2020, despite a damp August, with the help of our friendly farmer, most of the meadow was cut, turned and baled – with bales removed. The wildflower borders were left intact to allow heads to dry, mature and release their seeds.

On a glorious September Sunday a team of (socially distanced) Festival volunteers convened to complete the job, with team leader Bryan cutting the wildflower borders, and the rest raking.

In mid-October our enthusiastic volunteers enjoyed hand sowing six kilos of wildflower meadow seeds throughout the entire field. The following day, our friendly farmer, Owen harrowed the seeds into the whole field. A bit more raking up, and the field was ready for the winter."

*Read more about the project and the annual Arts Festival in Caerleon on [caerleon-arts.org](http://caerleon-arts.org)*



*Clockwise from top left: Kate Mobbs-Morgan with Kip and Sol cutting the field in 2017; baling operations by the cycleway; the volunteer team; preparing the border*



## Managing Our Meadow

David Emerson

It was a great pleasure to read Jon Dunkelman's piece on micro management in the last Newsletter. It was another example of the value MMG provides in sharing experience, and thereby reassuring to those of us who, to a greater or lesser extent feel we are constantly experimenting, and even sometimes being on the edge of making a potentially fatal change of practice. Responding to the invitation for comments, here are my own reflections, hopefully supporting what I see as the potential value of Jon's management.

The brief context is we have about 2.5 acres on limestone 400' above the North bank of the River Wye not far from Symonds Yat. Two acres are managed as wild flower meadow; the rest comprises an orchard and a small area to which I have introduced some orchids and other native flowers. The meadow was surveyed by Steph whose assessment was that it was likely to have been longstanding grassland.

Initial management on our arrival 14 years ago was a hay cut by modern farm machinery of the tussock grass field we inherited. In retrospect this was thoughtless as it must have lost us many ant hills, since restricted to the margins.

Subsequent management was by an annual late summer cut with small tractor hired in; followed by raking off by hand over a couple of days; and then further cutting with our old tractor mower. Some small areas were initially cut with our own Trakmaster. All hay was raked off downhill to piles at the margins under beech trees. As with Jon, these piles remain barely any larger than at first but the fungi they support are certainly more numerous.

This year for the first time I cut all the meadow with the Trakmaster, although when I started I hadn't planned to cut the whole meadow, but the sun shone so

I continued. I think it took me about 8 hours but this is probably about the sensible acreage limit for that scythe, and certainly so for myself in one day. I hired someone to help me rake off, and then cut the meadow again down to 2.5cm using an upgraded tractor mower and grass collector.

I support all the advantages Jon noted of being able to leave some later flowering plants, or others I especially want to encourage to seed. I was also able to avoid new growing ant hills, the wasp nests, and to leave small areas of Green Wing and some other orchids for separate management (the orchids are my special interest). Some marginal areas of longer grass were also left.

By walking systematically and slowly over the whole meadow I was able to study variations in topography and in plant communities, and to get a better idea of the overall variety of distribution of plants.

While it took more time, I was certainly in control of when I made the cut being less dependent on being able to hire equipment during limited fine weather, and I also felt more in control of the direction of the cut (hopefully enabling small creatures to escape) and of the whole process, thereby giving me greater insight into the meadow.

It is possible that the absence of the scrapings and other damage to the turf by the previously used farm machinery has left fewer bare areas for recolonisation, although there seem to be plenty enough molehills for that. Perhaps the lack of weight from tractor wheels may be less damaging to the mole runs?

But cutting 'by hand' was also quite demanding, and it deployed the Trakmaster far more than previously so I await what the annual servicing may reveal.

All in all I found this a more fulfilling way to cut the meadow, which I intend to repeat, and I am grateful to Jon for suggesting that such an apparently more intensive process is not complete madness.



## Twenty Years of 'Green Tape'

Sally Jones

### **A personal reflection on how agri-environment schemes including Tir Gofal and Glastir have supported our wildflower meadow management over 20 years**

I will never forget moving to Wales over 20 years ago; or the excitement of finally having our own little bit of land. My husband wanted a farm; I hoped for a beautiful old Victorian house with a walled garden. We compromised on a small welsh farmhouse which had been inexpertly extended over the years, but came with twelve acres of land in a secluded valley. The most magical moment of that first summer was seeing our three small children, ages two, five and seven, running across a meadow and realising that this was the first time in their short lives that they had ever been more than 20 metres away from a trusted adult.

Over the next few years we bought a few sheep, then a few more acres, then a few more sheep and a few more acres until our smallholding was more appropriately called a farm. It quickly transpired that my husband has a particular skill in making best use of the agri-environmental schemes available to us. We first joined Tir Gofal, which enabled us to put up double fences around all our hedgerows; and to replace ancient gates held together with bailing twine. This was a great relief to me and the children, all of whom had quickly tired of playing the role of sheepdogs when our tired old fences and hedgerows proved to be as useful for holding in sheep as a colander is for water.

We became organically certified with the Soil Association, which led to a reduction in the use of additional feed and medications, and a greater reliance on breeding a healthy flock. We now have a flock of around 80 Lleyn-Textel cross ewes, most of whom will lamb outside without any assistance. We use our own homegrown organic hay as additional feed in winter, along with small amounts of salt lick, and organic molasses in the lead-up to lambing. This small flock is key to our meadow management.

Glastir brought further support for our extensive grazing system, with limited inputs – very little feed and no fertilisers. It also supported good habitat management of the hedgerows, and coppicing of the woodlands – resulting in a brief side-line for Mr. Jones as a purveyor of bespoke hazel sticks for local gardeners!

Although we love all the land we manage there is one small meadow - a five-acre field running alongside a stream - which is particularly magical. Unimproved grassland when we acquired it, we have managed it with an annual hay cut after mid-July, and then follow-on grazing for the ewes 'drying off' when they are separated from their lambs in late summer or early autumn. Twenty years of consistent management as a traditional hay meadow has resulted in a lovely field full of wildflowers which produces a crop of heavenly-scented hay each year. The handful of orchids we first noticed has grown to over a thousand in recent years.

It was this field full of beautiful but mysterious wildflowers that led me to move on from studying an online course in horticulture with the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) to studying botanical identification of wildflowers. The Identiplant course was more difficult and less enjoyable than I had anticipated, but it did result in a certificate from the Field Studies Council – and I can now confidently identify the





Common Spotted, Heath Spotted and Southern Marsh Orchids in our hay meadow!

Having helped to manage the farm, family and house alongside a more-than-full-time career in the health service, early retirement and the subsequent time on my hands seemed to be a mixed blessing. Bowled over by the charms of the wildflowers we were seeing in our hay meadow, and finally able to recognise and identify them, I decided to set up a small organic wildflower nursery. This has taken me in new directions - predominantly long walks in summer collecting seeds from our own meadow and woodlands.

Wandering the lanes in search of photographic inspiration and to collect a few seeds for cultivation at home has also led to a new interest in 'verges as vestiges'. This is a concept I first read about through Plantlife's Road Verge campaign. Roadside verges tend to reflect the flora of the area, and are often the only vestigial reminder of the surrounding pastures, hay meadows or woodland that have disappeared as a result of intensive farming practices. Plantlife highlights that over 700 species of wildflower grow on verges – that's 45% of our total flora in the UK. The 500,000 km of rural road verges in the UK are equivalent in size to half of the remaining flower-rich grasslands and meadows. Imagine if they formed an enormous nature reserve across the nation! It is great to see initiatives such as Monmouthshire's Pollinator Policy, and Nature isn't Neat campaigning alongside Plantlife to restore and manage road verges for flowers, invertebrates and all

the other wildlife that is now surviving on the edge of what was once a far more extensive habitat.

It's also good to see a growing interest in which plants best support pollinators. The RHS provides a list of 'Plants for Pollinators' which can help guide gardeners interested in providing food and habitat for pollinators in their gardens. The scheme was initially called 'Perfect for Pollinators' but was changed because plants grown with use of insecticides (as some inevitably were) are anything but perfect! The species thought to be most beneficial for pollinators are now listed by the RHS as 'Plants for Pollinators'.

The National Botanic Garden of Wales 'Saving Pollinators' assurance scheme takes this idea one step further. Only plants which are grown without peat or insecticides, and which are proven through scientific study (pollen samples etc) are included. I have recently signed up to this. My organic plants will be included but the challenge for me is in phasing out peat entirely. I have used organically-certified compost containing filtered peat (peat that has been obtained from natural run-off in streams coming from peat bogs). I am now trialling using only a coir-based compost for all phases of growth, even seed germination. Only time will tell how successful this is.

As I write this we are awaiting details of the new Welsh Sustainable Farming Scheme. The scheme plans to support environmental outcomes such as improved soils, clean air, clean water, improved habitat condition, and actions to reduce global warming. The aims of public money for public goods are laudable. The devil will be in the detail, which I have no doubt Mr. Jones will be studying closely!

*Sally runs **Welsh Organic Wildflowers** selling plug plants from their farm at Llantilio Crossenny, near Abergavenny*



*Left: Sally's meadow with Ribwort Plantain, Meadow Buttercup and Common Knapweed in view*

*Opposite page: Self Heal, Bird's-foot Trefoil and Red Clover*



### Dung Beetle Awareness

Dung beetles are very important insects. They improve the quality and structure of soil, reduce parasites in livestock and provide many other vital services in grasslands. But like many things in nature today, their numbers are decreasing due to changes to agricultural practices, and many of the 60 UK species are seriously threatened. Not being perceived as favourably as, for example, bees and butterflies, their importance is often overlooked, which is a shame because dung beetles are incredibly varied, and can come in some beautiful, vivid colours and iridescences when seen up close.

The web site [www.dungbeetlesforfarmers.co.uk](http://www.dungbeetlesforfarmers.co.uk) has been set up recently by a group describing themselves as 'passionate dung beetle devotees'. It is primarily aimed at farmers but full of useful information for grassland owners, which could change perceptions of these hard-working insects.

If that sparks an interest, you might also like to explore [www.thebugfarm.co.uk](http://www.thebugfarm.co.uk).



*Aphodius dung beetles (Max Anderson)*

### Neonicotinoids Return

Sometimes it feels like protecting the environment moves one step forward, two steps back. In the last issue we reported on the good news that the outdoor use of metaldehyde, the poisonous chemical most frequently used in slug pellets, is to be banned from March 2022.

Now, the Government has announced that neonicotinoids, the pesticide ingredient banned because of its lethal effect on bees and other pollinators, is to be allowed for use by farmers in England to combat a virus

in sugar beet. Defra confirmed this temporary right to use the insecticide Thiamethoxam as a result of lobbying from the NFU, reversing a ruling against this use in 2018, despite the promise by the then Environment Secretary, Michael Gove, that the neonicotinoid ban would not be lifted unless scientific evidence changed. In fact, the opposite has occurred, and evidence shows this poison has a more devastating impact on the environment than originally presented.

Those promoting neonicotinoids claim that use on sugar beet will not affect wildlife, as pollinators do not land on the crop, but this ignores the majority of the pesticide that ends up in the surrounding soil, where it can be absorbed by the roots of wildflowers and hedgerow plants, or leach into rivers and streams, affecting invertebrates that have part of their life cycle in water.

There is more information on the Wildlife Trust's web site [www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/bad-news-bees-government-reverses-ban-bee-killing-neonicotinoids](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/news/bad-news-bees-government-reverses-ban-bee-killing-neonicotinoids) and there is a petition on the parliament web site asking the Government to reinstate a complete ban [petition.parliament.uk/petitions/569214](http://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/569214) (closes in July 2021).

### Grass Snakes

The Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) Trust are requesting information on known or potential grass snake sites in south Wales. They can also provide advice on creating and managing these sites. Their Connecting the Dragons Project Officer, Mark Barber, says:

"Do you have or want a compost heap, manure heap, or pile of rotting vegetation on your land? We are attempting to map all the current and planned grass



*Grass Snake (Keith Moseley)*



snake (*Natrix helvetica*) oviposition sites across the southern half of Wales. How many are out there? How well distributed are they? How are they managed?"

There is a form online to respond to this request:  
[Grass Snakes Survey Form](#)

More information can be found on the ARC Trust web site: [www.arc-trust.org/news/compost-for-victory-grass-snakes-need-your-help](http://www.arc-trust.org/news/compost-for-victory-grass-snakes-need-your-help)

## Community Nature Spaces in Monmouth

The County Council is currently consulting residents of Monmouth over plans to encourage nature to thrive around the town's Rockfield estate. The Welsh Government's *Local Places for Nature* scheme is funding the study to involve residents in developing nine 'Community Nature Spaces' at four neighbourhood play areas across Overmonnow.

These will include areas for growing vegetables, flowers and fruit trees and tree planting as well as 're-wilding areas into mini meadows'. The aim is to provide benefits for residents, as well as habitats for pollinators and other forms of wildlife.

The grant will take the project to the design stage, with the hope that further funding will allow the spaces to be developed before April 2022.

Other organisations will be involved in the project, including the local County Council member, Monmouth Town Council, Transition Monmouth, ACE (Action on



*Bee Orchids in Cornpoppy Avenue  
(Jennifer Robbins)*

Climate Emergency), Gwent Wildlife Trust, Rockfield Community Centre and NRW (Natural Resources Wales).

The Council's press release includes more information and a link to the consultation survey:

[www.monlife.co.uk/council-to-create-community-nature-spaces-for-monmouths-rockfield-estate](http://www.monlife.co.uk/council-to-create-community-nature-spaces-for-monmouths-rockfield-estate)

## Cornpoppy Avenue Bee Orchids

Another space, which is not a playground, which could be turned into a mini meadow is already a significant site. On the corner of Cornpoppy Avenue and Watery Lane is a patch of land, still owned by the developers of the Rockfield Estate, which is home to hundreds of Bee Orchids every summer. The land is now for sale. The agent stated that they are looking for a development price of up to £200,000 for the plot. But about 15 years ago the land was refused planning permission due to flood risk. As it flooded in both 2019 and 2020, permission would be even less likely to be granted now. Our hope is that in the meantime the developers can adopt a sympathetic mowing regime for the orchids which would in fact save money with less mowing. It would be wonderful to think that one day this patch could be the flagship site for 'Bee Friendly Monmouth', a haven for Bee Orchids.



## Plantlife's Good Verge Guide

Plantlife has published an updated edition of their introductory guide to managing road verges **The Good Verge Guide**. This edition includes extra information on managing urban verges and sowing wildflower seeds on verges, as well as answering frequently asked questions about how individuals can help to transform local verges into wild flower havens. The digital version can be downloaded from

[www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/publications/good-verge-guide-different-approach-managing-our-waysides-and-verges](http://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/publications/good-verge-guide-different-approach-managing-our-waysides-and-verges)

Plantlife is also updating their more technical guide **Managing Grassland Road Verges** designed for local authorities and other professionals. In 2020 the charity won the prestigious 'Best Practice in Knowledge-Sharing' Award from the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) for this guide. The new edition should be available later this year.

## Magnificent Meadows Cymru

Last Spring, this newsletter featured Plantlife Cymru's Magnificent Meadows project, which received Welsh Government funding to promote conservation of species-rich grassland across Wales. Since then, the Magnificent Meadows team have encouraged new meadows groups, including incipient groups in Pembrokeshire and The Gower, and one covering Vale of Glamorgan, Bridgend and Neath Port Talbot.

The next stage is the provision of training in meadows management and species identification, and MMG members will have received an online survey to assess the demand for this in our area. Information will be provided on the MMG web site if anything comes of this proposal.

Find out more about Magnificent Meadows Cymru at:

[www.plantlife.org.uk/wales/our-work/projects-wales-cymru/magnificent-meadows-cymru-wales](http://www.plantlife.org.uk/wales/our-work/projects-wales-cymru/magnificent-meadows-cymru-wales)

## National Plant Monitoring Scheme

Plantlife is also collaborating with the BSBI and others in another initiative to collect data to provide a nationwide picture of changes in plant abundance and diversity. It is being carried out by volunteers who are randomly allocated a local 1 km square. In it they will record plant 'indicator species' in five semi-natural habitats.



It not just for expert botanists, anyone interested can sign up for a square. But they are going fast! [www.npms.org.uk](http://www.npms.org.uk).

## A Local Nature Partnership for Monmouthshire

The Local Nature Partnership Cymru is a nationwide network of partnerships covering every local authority and National Park Authorities in Wales, funded by Welsh Government in 2019 to run until 2022.

Within this national support framework, the previously formed Newport Biodiversity Partnership has teamed up with organisations in Monmouthshire to become the **Monmouthshire and Newport Local Nature Partnership (LNP)**. Their aim is to coordinate the work of various environmental organisations and statutory bodies to promote action for nature across the region. In particular they have a remit to contribute to well-being objectives of the Welsh Government, and to support a Green recovery from the effects of Covid-19.

The Partnership includes a broad range of organisations and individuals, including statutory and public bodies, environmental charities (including MMG), community groups, academics, wildlife recorders and interested members of the public. The role of the LNP Coordinator (Sali Palmer) and Support Coordinator (Lucy Arnold-Matthews) is to establish local priorities for



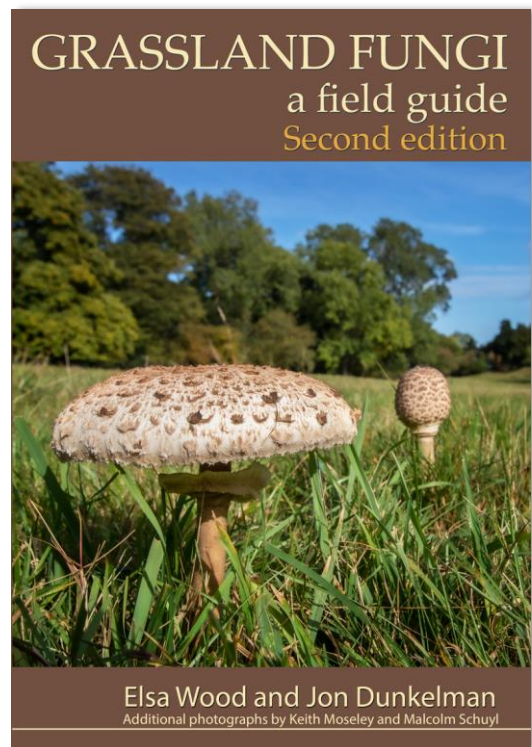
action and compile a Local Nature Recovery Action Plan. They will also run events and activities to further the partnership's aims. The LNP has already supported the Neglected Grasslands project, restoring grasslands in publicly accessible sites in Abergavenny, and has provided funding to various local conservation groups. It is likely you will hear more about them in the coming months. [www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/newport](http://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/newport)

### Grassland Fungi: The Next Stage

MMG is pleased to report that sales of our second edition of *Grassland Fungi: A Field Guide* have been very pleasing, and with the additional funds this has brought in the team are planning to make their photographs available online, as a supplemental identification resource. This project will be taking place over the next few months and, if all goes well, will go public for the next fungi season.

In the meantime, the book is available from NHBS [www.nhbs.com](http://www.nhbs.com) for £19.99 plus postage.

If this has wetted your appetite for fungi in general, Gwent Fungus Group has regular forays and, in



non-Covid times, an annual open day in autumn. Details about the group are on their web site [www.gwentfungi.org.uk](http://www.gwentfungi.org.uk)



*A Waxcap medley, clockwise from top left: Pink Waxcap, Parrot Waxcap, Scarlet Waxcap, Golden Waxcap  
(Jon Dunkelman, Keith Moseley)*



## Dates for your Diary

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

**Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> March:** Gwent Wildlife Trusts' **Local Wildlife Sites Landowners Day** online, 10am to 1pm.

**Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> April:** Monmouthshire Botany Group Walk at Clytha, Usk (see page 7)

**Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> April:** MMG AGM and online social, with talk on Orchids by Sean Cole, online from 7pm. Details in this newsletter (page 3), booking form on the MMG web site

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> May:** Monmouthshire Botany Group Walk at Silent valley reserve (see page 7)

**Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> June:** Monmouthshire Botany Group Walk at Blaentrothy meadows (see page 7)

**Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> June:** MMG's **Open Meadows Day**, at members' fields near Llanishen (see page 3)

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> June:** Monmouthshire Botany Group Walk at Dyffryn, Bloreng farm (see page 7)

**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> June:** Open Meadows Day at Llanlowell House (see page 3)

**Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> July:** Monmouthshire Botany Group Walk at Hendre Woods (see page 7)

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> August:** Monmouth Bee Festival (subject to confirmation – details to follow)

**Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> August:** Monmouthshire Botany Group Walk at Cwm Carn (see page 7)

**Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> September:** Usk Show

**Monday 20<sup>th</sup> to Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> September:** Climate Future Festival in Monmouth

**Gwent Wildlife Trust** runs events throughout the year. A full list of their events and activities, booking details and locations can be found on [www.gwentwildlife.org/whats-on](http://www.gwentwildlife.org/whats-on)

### Online Talks and Training

Many organisations introduced online events while Covid-19 restrictions prevented in-person meetings. Last September the Wye Valley AONB achieved a tremendous feat by moving their River Festival entirely online, including a presentation about meadows in the Wye Valley featuring MMG, which is still available (along with other films and presentations from the festival): [www.wyevalleyriverfestival.co.uk/marvellous-meadows-of-the-wye-valley](http://www.wyevalleyriverfestival.co.uk/marvellous-meadows-of-the-wye-valley)

Buglife [www.buglife.org.uk/events](http://www.buglife.org.uk/events) have talks through March, including **Creating, maintaining and enhancing habitat for pollinators** on **Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> March, 6pm to 7pm**

Plantlife ran a series of sessions throughout February, under the banner **Spring into Action**, some sessions are still available to view on YouTube ([search for Plantlife's channel](#))

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**



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

