

Conserving and Restoring Wildflower-rich Grasslands in Monmouthshire

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Contributions to the newsletter
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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)



From the Chair

After two years of relatively little activity during the Covid pandemic, we certainly caught up this year with a full calendar of events, and it isn't over yet with our October Fungi Walk and (hopefully) our Autumn Get-together still to come.

Our programme started in April with our first AGM in person since 2019, with guest speaker Caroline Hanks from Herefordshire Meadows. Their very successful group shares our objectives of creating and conserving species rich grassland, but they have a different focus. Herefordshire's core expertise is working in partnership with farmers, promoting the value of flower rich grassland as part of a productive farm business. They have over 500 farmers and meadow owners in their network. MMG is more varied, with members ranging from farmers and landowners with many acres to people managing their gardens as mini-meadows. We could learn a lot from each other's different approaches.

Next year is our 20th anniversary, and we have come a long way in those years. Ten years ago we produced an anniversary book, in which we proudly announced we had reached 150 members. Since then that number has more than doubled to around 330. Meadows have a much higher profile these days, with more publicity on the news and gardening shows, and we like to think we have contributed a little to that interest. Sadly, there is a



The stunning meadows at Crosshands where we held our first Open Meadows of 2022 in June (Pip Morrison)

long way to go and the recent heat wave and accompanying drought has reminded us how important it is to keep working hard to conserve our natural defences against the effects of a changing climate.

In this issue, in addition to our usual items we include a piece on controlling bracken by mechanical means, an orchard meadow where prize winning cider

is produced, and news of our anniversary calendar celebrating our 20th birthday. There's also a supplement, with a detailed look at the equipment members use to cut, collect and make hay on their meadows.

Rachel Morgan

2022 Highlights and Our Future Programme

AGM, Talks and Socials

As mentioned above, our AGM featured a talk by Caroline Hanks of Herefordshire Meadows. Sadly, a surge in Covid kept many members away so we didn't have our usual numbers. Because of the uncertainty we decided not to serve our traditional buffet supper. In the business part of the AGM, the current committee was re-elected and the financial statement presented showing a very healthy position. A summary of all this [is on our web site](#).

Coming up this Autumn, Llandogo Hall is booked on **Thursday 27th October** for an evening social, with talks by two MMG members. Hopefully we shall be back to normal with a buffet supper, giving plenty of time to chat to others, swap ideas and generally catch up. Details will be confirmed by email to members nearer the time, and on our web site, and there are more details on page 7.

Open Meadows

Our two spring Open Meadows were as busy as ever, and we are very grateful to all our hosts.

In June we visited Susan and Patrick Harrington at their home and Local Wildlife Site at Broom House near Raglan (where Susan served much appreciated cake and refreshments), and Pip Morrison's meadows at Crosshands near Llansoy (pictured on our front page). The term 'species rich' hardly does justice to Pip's meadows – it's

hard to believe this wealth of diversity was once commonplace across the country.

In July, for National Meadows Day, we visited Sally Jones at Lower Pantygoida near Tal-y-coed; and Teona Dorrien-Smith at Upper Red House at Llanvihangel-Ystern-Llewern. Sally runs her business, Welsh Organic Wildflowers, from the farm so there was an opportunity for some eco-retail therapy at her plant stall. Teona is a long-standing member and a good friend to MMG, and it's always a delight to revisit her lovely organic farm. On both days we were supported by Andy Karran of Gwent Wildlife Trust, and Wendy Tyler-Batt who stepped in to save the day when Covid affected our volunteer numbers. Many thanks are due to them both for leading flower walks, and sharing their expertise and knowledge.

This Autumn we shall be leading a guided walk through fungi-rich meadows in Trellech – more about this on page 7.



*Left: Wendy Tyler-Batt leading the guided walk at our June Open Meadow (Pip Morrison)
Right: Diana Clark leads the search for amphibians and reptiles at the ARC training day in Trellech (Clare Adamson)*



Training Courses

The scything courses with Andrea Gilpin last year revealed a great interest in training on meadow-related topics, so this year we held a number of workshops.

In May, experienced educator and meadow-maker Ian Rabjohns ran a very successful day on meadow management, Meadow Making by Hand, demonstrating how he looked after his land. In June, Steph Tyler led a flower identification course at Pentwyn Farm, and in July Andrea returned for two more scything days, for which we also thank our hosts, Elizabeth and Ross Murray at Llanover Garden, and Judith Carruthers at Rockfield.

We were lucky to be included in Plantlife's programme of courses too, funded through their Magnificent Meadows project. The first was a day on Meadow Management for Reptiles and Amphibians, which didn't quite go to plan after the trainer from the ARC Trust was taken ill, but his stand-in, Diana Clark of Koru Ecology Associates, rescued the day. Diana is an ecologist and consultant with an in-depth knowledge of surveying for these animals. We even spotted a grass snake on our walk around Trellech Wet Meadow.

Plantlife also held a day on Monitoring your Meadow, at Pentwyn Farm, likewise fully booked.

We will investigate more opportunities for training next season based on interest shown in our members' survey. We welcome suggestions too – and offers if you have a particular, relevant expertise. So far our courses have all filled very quickly so please don't delay booking if you see something you are interested in.

Out and About

There were three outings for our stall this summer. We were again at the excellent, annual Bee Festival in July, organised by Bees for Development in Monmouth.

Also in Monmouth, we supported Wye July, an event organised by Friends of the Lower Wye to highlight the truly distressing plight of the river with its current unprecedented pollution levels and consequent habitat destruction and loss of biodiversity.

In August we attended the Chepstow Show in the 'Green Tent', sponsored by Gwent Energy cic and Bee Friendly Monmouthshire – meeting up with old friends not seen since before the pandemic.



Open day shopping at Lower Pantygoida (Jon Dunkelman)



Staying in the shade at Wye July (Clare Adamson)



Not as easy as it looks! Learning to use a power scythe at Ian Rabjohns' Meadow Making day (Phil Pickersgill)



Pam Manfield talks to visitors in the Green Tent at Chepstow Show

Work Parties

Each year we have a number of work parties to help maintain our own reserves and other land where support is needed. We realise we need to organise these more efficiently, and recruit more volunteers to help. If you have answered our members' survey we will be in touch about this for next year's programme. Otherwise, if you can help from time to time please let our membership secretary, Marilyn, know and she will add you to our volunteer list.

We are very grateful to the people that have helped, in particular David Llewellyn and Trevor Tyler-Batt who operate our Tracmaster power scythe, Dick Coates for looking after Wet Meadow, and everyone who turned out to lend a hand this year.

News from Our Reserves: Wet Meadow

Our warden at Wet Meadow, Dick Coates, reports that the hay was cut and harvested during the first week in August: a poor crop owing to the drought and the success of Yellow Rattle and Knapweed! The honey and bumblebees loved the Knapweed, but we did miss the Six-spot Burnet Moth this year. The mystery of the failure of the 1000s of orchids (mainly Heath & Common-spotted) that used to appear in Brewery Paddock over the previous years is gradually being replaced by those appearing in new places in all five fields. Earlier the Kingcups gave another wonderful display and the Dyer's Greenweed is at last spreading. It is intriguing to see the



Grass Snake found in Wet Meadow (Dick Coates), and Dick showing a favourite spot for them (Clare Adamson)



Bird's-foot Trefoil emerging now, in drought conditions, while the grass shows no sign of recovery. We have been debating the need for soil aeration and would very much like to hear from members who have done this on wildlife meadows.

The pond creation project is proposed for completion by end of October. This comprises a dew pond in Dyer's Field, financed by GWT, and an off-stream pond with controlled spring water input in Roman Park, financed by MMG (both grant aided). These are both in areas of dense bracken with high winter table in permeable soil. The need for bracken eradication in the immediate surroundings is obvious, but it is not yet agreed on how this is best achieved. It is hoped that the Roman Park pond can be used for pond dipping by Trellech Primary School.



A new design of Barn Owl box was erected this spring on one of the Oak trees in Dyer's Field, and a temporary hunting perch beside the newly planted Oak tree in the

Owl box made by Richard Clarke and erected in Wet Meadow. The box is made of recycled agricultural plastic waste, so should last a few years

centre of Roman Park. We have a thriving colony of Tawny Owls, but it is hope that this provision will now attract a breeding pair of Barn Owls. There is already a box in the roof void of 13 Roman Way, providing accommodation for the male. There is a super abundance of prey. The voles have starting using the mole runs; there is plenty of choice. 1,000 mole hills were counted in approximately one acre in May!

Kingcoed and Ida's Meadow

Ida's Meadow had a wonderful display of Butterfly Orchids this year. Bracken was cleared by a work party before the field was cut and baled.

Kingcoed Meadows also looked spectacular, and many people visited them on our Open Meadows day. The fields were grazed as usual by mountain sheep from Ystradfellte over the winter, and this summer they have been cut with some blocks left uncut as additional habitat.

Grassland Seeds and Social Media

Normally our first recommendation for anyone wanting to increase the floral diversity in their grassland is to let it develop naturally. If a field already has five or more meadow species, then it is likely more will arrive with time, provided there are seed sources nearby. Sometimes, just introducing Yellow Rattle is a good way to speed up the process.

However, if land needs a helping hand, the best way to seed an area of grassland is to use green hay from a neighbouring species-rich site. This has to be done as soon as the grass is cut, so it must be well planned with transport for the hay available to move it and spread it over the recipient site the same day.

This year we supplied Yellow Rattle seeds to a number of members, but demand is increasing and we are encouraging people to collect their own. To this end, we have set up a Facebook group for members to do their own matchmaking, whether between donor sites and recipients of green hay, or just somewhere to collect their own Rattle seed. We hope to develop this group for more self-help introductions: [MMG Facebook Group](#)

For guidance on using Yellow Rattle and green hay, there are links from our web page [Meadow Advice](#).

We have also set up an Instagram account; @monmouthshiremeadows. We are always happy to add your photos, if you send a direct message. Or follow us and use the hashtag #MonmouthshireMeadows.

Exmoor Ponies

Our Exmoor ponies, Jacinth and Jemima, have been busy over the summer, moving from Judith Carruther's land in Rockfield, back to land in Trellech, then to Whitebrook, where the drought created a lot of work for Louisa and Paul Stafford filling the water bucket several times a day. They went back to Trellech for some

attention from the farrier then off to Jane and Tony Pannett at Tintern for the autumn.

All that has kept Steph and Alan Poulter busy too, moving the ponies and checking on them regularly as they settle into each new temporary home.



Kingcoed Meadows this June (Rachel Morgan)

Surveys of Members' Fields

What a year – I and my fellow botanists Elsa Wood, Sheelagh Kerry and Wendy Tyler-Batt, have been catching up with surveys and advisory visits to members who joined during Covid and also the many new members this year. We have between us visited 35 members and also re-visited several. It is a real privilege to see members' private land, especially when we discover how rich in plants it is.

We have looked at small but lovely garden meadows to whole farms of more than 50 acres and have travelled from the Gwent Levels to the Black Mountains and from the Wye Valley across the Usk Valley to the western valleys. We have seen at least ten or eleven important sites that qualify as Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) and many others where real efforts are being made to enhance the grassland and which in time will I am sure be of sufficient interest to qualify as LWSs.

In addition to surveys of members' land we were asked by Shirenewton Community Council to undertake surveys of Shirenewton Recreation Ground and Mynyddbach village green for which payment was made to MMG.

We also surveyed Gilwern Common for Mary Ann Brocklesby, the new Chair of Monmouthshire County

Council who came to the MMG stand at the Friends of the Lower Wye event in Monmouth. Some local residents have asked that this flower-rich common be managed as a meadow rather than being mown regularly.

If you have joined recently and have not been contacted for a survey, please get in touch in case our emails have gone astray.

Steph Tyler



Steph and Wendy, and Poppy and Archie, surveying a member's land (Hugh Roberts)

Welcome to our New Members

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

Rae and Adam Chapman, Lydart
Michael Driscoll, Llangovan
Matt Fletcher, Brockweir
Seb Gwyther, Llantillio Crosseney
Catherine Hallam, Cwmyoy
Catherine Harris, Trellech Grange
Georgina Herrmann, Penrhos
Robert and Jacqui Hill, Llanishen
Rod Jones, Cardiff
Kate Lucas, Cardiff
Debs Mackay, Strelley
Andrea Mallalieu, Penrhos
Mel Matthews, Shirenewton
Janette Munday, The Narth

Janet Morgan, Crickhowell
Jonathan Mudd, Gilwern
Theresa Oakley, Garway
Nicholas Palmer, Penyaemawr
Robin and Kate Pargeter, Penallt
Graham Pleasants, Bristol
Verena Reid, The Narth
Joe Ryder, Lydart
Miranda and Alex Shaw, Llansoy
Edward Spuffard, Bishton
Laura Tenison, Llandewi Skirrid
Eifion Thomas, Chepstow
Simon Walker, Llanvaches

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 our Membership Secretary, Marilyn Dunkelman, marilyn@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk or phone 01600 860031

Autumn Grassland Fungi Walk

An Open Meadow Event on Sunday 23rd October in Trellech

Join us for a guided walk through Wet Meadow and New Grove Meadows to spot and identify the fascinating, colourful fungi that appear in species-rich grasslands at this time of year.

The walk will be led by Elsa Wood and Jon Dunkelman, who together produced our guide to grassland fungi (see page 8). We hope to see a number of different species of Waxcap and Pinkgills, and with luck maybe delicate Corals and Spindles as well as some of the more common grassland fungi.

We will start at 1.30pm and take around 2-2½ hours. Parking will be at the Trellech Surgery, with their kind permission. Anyone with reduced mobility can instead park in the forest car park near New Grove Meadows and join us for just the second part of the walk. Directions and more details are on our web site.

Please book your place in advance [through the web site](#) or contact Marilyn (contact details are on the front page).

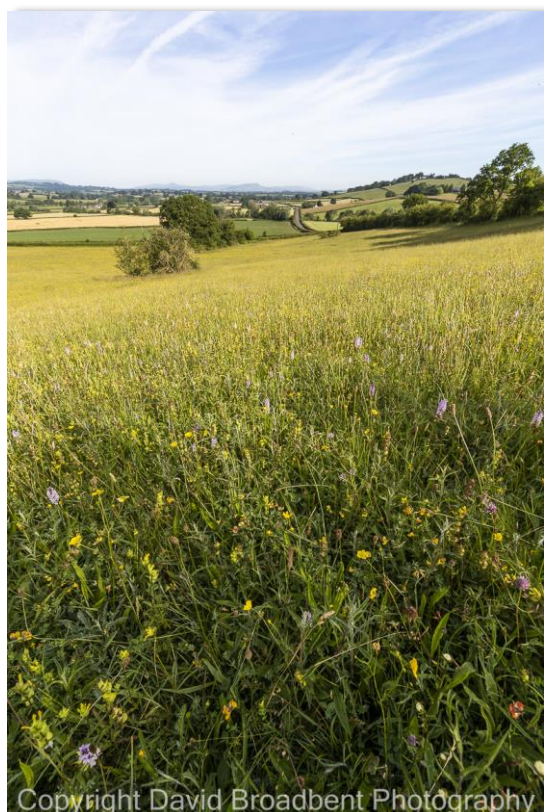


Pink Waxcap, Porpolomopsis calyptriformis
(Jon Dunkelman)

Autumn Get-Together

Thursday 27th October

This October we are returning (finally!) to our popular meetings with a buffet supper, to be held in Llandogo Village Hall. There will be illustrated talks from two of our members, Pip Morrison and Wendy Tyler-Batt, and plenty of time to chat to other meadow owners. It's a great opportunity to compare techniques and learn from each other.



Copyright David Broadbent Photography

A view of Pip Morrison's land at Crosshands, taken by professional photographer David Broadbent

Pip is the owner of the meadows at Crosshands which was one of our June Open Meadows. A landscape architect, now living in Hampshire, Pip was brought up in Llansoy and inherited the 10 acre field and small wood, which has been in the family since 1900. It is one of the best species-rich meadows in Monmouthshire, with over 41 indicator species of unimproved grassland. Pip will talk about the geology and history of the landscape as well as demonstrating the results of management as a traditional hay meadow over the years.

Wendy and her husband Trevor own a smaller field, now a lovely wildflower meadow, at their home near The Hendre. Wendy is an experienced botanist who led some of our guided walks at the Open Meadows. She will be talking about how they manage their land, and showing the successes they have achieved.

The buffet supper is £15 for members, £18 for non-members, or members can attend just the talks for no cost (£3 for non-members).

Doors open at 7pm for a 7.30pm start. Please book in advance as we need numbers for the catering – details and the booking form are on our web site or let Marilyn know you are coming

Three Counties Win for Local Cider Maker

Congratulations to MMG member Jeremy Harris of Hollow Ash Orchard, Broad Oak, for winning 'Best in Herefordshire' and 'Reserve Champion'* at the Three Counties Show: Cider and Perry Competition 2022. Jeremy's Cwm Maddoc bottle-conditioned cider and perry were both awarded first place in their respective classes. It was the Thorn perry which gained Jeremy recognition as 'Reserve Champion'*. The awards are particularly pleasing because Jeremy is a very small craft producer and every part of the process from hand-picking the fruit to bottling and labelling the finished product is carried out by the Hollow Ash team: Jeremy and his wife Clare!

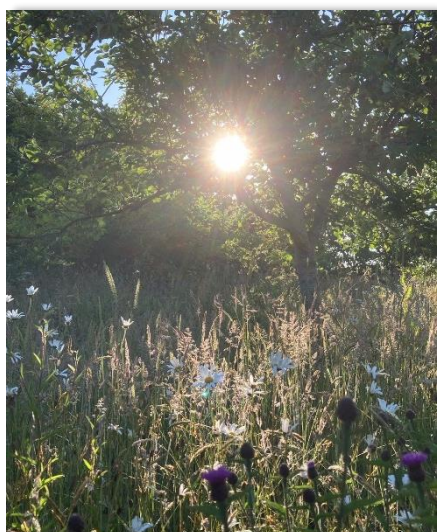
Sadly, small traditional cider and perry orchards (and consequently cider makers!) are not as abundant in the three counties and Monmouthshire as in previous centuries. Mature trees, so valuable for their associated wildlife, are now in decline - in fact two very old and rare perry pear trees which Jeremy and Clare pick in Monmouthshire were blown down this winter in the storms. Hollow Ash Orchard was planted with old and local apple and pear varieties, in the same location as the

orchard shown on the 1698 Cwm Maddoc estate map. It was planted primarily for its benefit to wildlife and in the hope of restoring a little bit of our traditional landscape. It was only when the apple crop became abundant that the idea of making cider and perry blossomed.

The combination of early spring blossom and wild flowers is an invaluable food source for pollinators. Inspired by the wonderful orchard at Ty Mawr Convent, Lydart, with its stunning carpet of wildflowers, a species rich meadow has been successfully established at Hollow Ash beneath the fruit trees using green hay from an MMG donor site. The trees, which are unsprayed, are widely spaced so that the meadow can be cut for hay; this has been done using a small tractor but as the trees are increasing in size this is becoming impractical. The scythes will be sharpened for next year!

Hollow Ash/Cwm Maddoc ciders, perries and juices are sold locally at Broad Oak Garage, St Weonards Shop, Pengethly Farm Shop and The Marches Deli in Monmouth.

*'Champion' was awarded to an iced cider from Poland which was truly delicious!



Through the seasons at Clare and Jeremy's orchard meadow



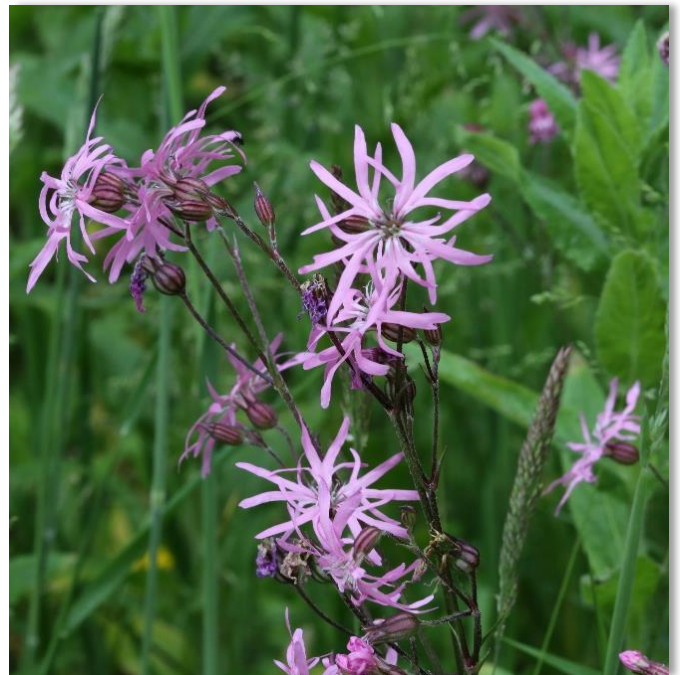
Value What You Have!

Do you have a boggy or marshy area on your land?

If you are lucky enough to have a damp or wet grassy area on your land, then please treasure this habitat. Such habitats are a priority for conservation and support a range of interesting plants such as Devil's-bit Scabious, Sneezewort and Ragged Robin, and a diversity of invertebrates and small mammals. These habitats are still being degraded due to drainage but another threat is the planting of trees on such land.

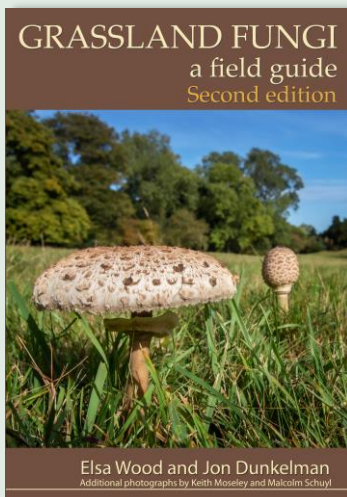
Before you undertake any tree planting please ensure that you will not be damaging more important habitats and avoid bogs and marshes and flower-rich grassland. These are of greater conservation importance than a new plantation which will in time oust the botanical interest through shading and through lack of grazing. Don't forget too that existing permanent grassland, whether wet or dry, is a significant carbon sink, every bit as much as new trees.

Steph Tyler



Ragged Robin (Jon Dunkelman)

Grassland Fungi: A Field Guide



It is Fungi Season again, and if you haven't already obtained a copy of our Grassland Fungi field guide, now is a good time.

The only comprehensive field guide dedicated to the identification of fungi found in grassland, the book is designed to encourage beginners to learn more about these intriguing species while still being suitable for fungi enthusiasts. An easy to carry A5 format with 400 pages, covering 200 species with clear descriptions of each, and over 900 photographs. Key identification points help distinguish between similar species.

Buy one before our Fungi Walk in October - you will be able to start species spotting straight away.

All proceeds go to Monmouthshire Meadows Group. The authors, editor and additional photographers (Keith Moseley and Malcolm Schuyt) all gave their time voluntarily.

Grassland Fungi A Field Guide by Elsa Wood and Jon Dunkelman is available from www.nhbs.com/grassland-fungi-book for £19.99 + p&p.

Published by Monmouthshire Meadows Group

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The Mechanical Control of Bracken

Trevor Tyler-Batt

How best to manage increasing Bracken growth is both a personal issue and a common question heard at Monmouthshire Meadows Group (MMG) Open Meadow Days and meetings. Having researched the answer for myself I felt it might be useful to share my findings in this short piece.

Although I suspect nearly all MMG members would wish to follow a non-chemical approach to Bracken control, for completeness, I have included links to information on the current situation with the herbicide asulam (Asulox).^{1, 2}

Botanical background

Bracken is a perennial fern with world-wide distribution. It is widespread across the UK, particularly on neutral to acid soils in western parts of Britain. The main species found is *Pteridium aquilinum* and more specifically the sub-species *aquilinum* (though several other sub-species are also present).

Bracken has an extensively branched rhizome system consisting of thick storage organs that run deep underground, and thinner shallow rhizomes on which the fronds are borne. The fronds generally emerge in May (late-spring frosts can damage the emerging shoots) and in grassland habitats, once established it forms a dense canopy by the end of June. The young rhizomes cannot tolerate waterlogging.

Bracken has several features that enable it to successfully colonise grassland and meadows:

- Deep storage rhizomes constitute a formidable reserve of growth potential and extension rhizomes that advance ahead of the main patch may grow more than a metre a year.
- Tall wide fronds which lead to extremely dense canopies causing severe shading to plant species below, limiting the availability of vital light.
- Production of heavy levels of litter suppresses the ability of other plant species to get a foothold for colonisation.
- Production of toxic defensive compounds against herbivores and

disease infections, and which directly suppress the growth of other plants in its vicinity.

Apart from spreading via their rhizomes Bracken, like all ferns, can also reproduce sexually through their spores (alternation of generations) although these are important only for colonizing new sites.

Ecological Aspects

Although Bracken is generally considered to have limited wildlife value, it has been shown to play a considerable role in succession within a landscape³ and on more open sites, it is the preferred habitat for birds like the Whinchat and Nightjar. It may also provide useful cover for other ground-nesting bird hatchlings. Additionally where there are violets or Common Cow-wheat (*Melampyrum pratense*) beneath the Bracken canopy these may be important for fritillary butterflies.

Mechanical Control

The most up-to-date review of UK Bracken control measures located is one published online earlier this year by Dr David Cutress from Aberystwyth University's Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences.⁴

In the review Cutress highlights the current control strategies from an agricultural perspective (as set out in 'a useful handout' produced by Business Wales Farming Connect⁵) and in his assessment of the



Bracken encroachment at the edge of a meadow (Jon Dunkelman)

comparative effectiveness of cutting vs. crushing, breaking, rolling or bruising he notes:

“Based on the mode of action of crushing being similar to cutting it is likely that the differences occur based on how well the bracken structure is damaged by the specific crushing technique”.

These alternatives to cutting clearly have advantages in difficult to access locations, such as hill slopes, or on uneven terrain where damage to cutting equipment is likely. The review also covers burning and livestock grazing.

There are a number of other less recent reviews:

- 2008 - Three Information Notes from Natural England on Bracken; one is a general species Information Note (SIN011),⁶ with the other two covering the technical aspects of Bracken control (TIN047 and TIN048).^{7, 8} TIN047 takes a wider look at some of the ecological, archaeological and landscape issues and suggests priorities in a number of conflict situations. A similar publication on Bracken Control (to the TINs) produced, in the same year, by Scotland’s Nature Agency.⁹
- 2007 - A fully referenced 13 page review of the biology and non-chemical control of Bracken by Bond, Davies and Turner (of Garden Organic - the Henry Doubleday Research Association, as was).¹⁰

Hand pulling gets a fleeting mention in the HDRA 2007 review. Scottish supporting guidance for Bracken management 2022¹¹ notes that it rarely used as part of a control strategy, because it is labour intensive. It is unlikely to be any more effective than cutting but it can be considered for smaller patches of bracken or stands of bracken growing within hedges. It is my experience that the ease of pulling fronds varies and that mature fronds can splinter and lacerate your hands – use of heavy gloves is advised by the RHS.

Conclusion

In compiling this piece I have come to the view that unless the ground is uneven (or has other hazards likely to damage cutting equipment), or the fronds are newly emerged (i.e. soft), that cutting has the advantage (over bashing/rolling) simply because it is easier to remove Bracken litter from a site following cutting. Removing the fronds is considered important in order to

give other, more desirable, meadow plants a better chance of flourishing.

Whatever the mechanical control measure opted for, it will certainly need to be applied more than once a year and to maintain even low levels of Bracken is likely to require ongoing application.

Trevor Tyler-Batt

¹ Bracken control – An update following the annual meeting of the Bracken Control Groups at Ingram, Northumberland in June **2019** Palmer C. in *Forestry and Timber News* August 2019 <https://www.confor.org.uk/media/247558/bracken-control.pdf>

² Bracken Control Group Emergency Authorisation of Asulam (Asulox) for **2022**: <https://www.brackencontrol.co.uk/asulam>

³ R.H. Marrs, M.G. Le Duc, R.J. Mitchell *et al.* The Ecology of Bracken: Its Role in Succession and Implications for Control, *Annals of Botany*, Vol 85, Supplement B, 2000, Pages 3-15, <https://doi.org/10.1006/anbo.1999.1054>

⁴ Battling Bracken: Control and alleviation strategies February **2022** <https://businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect/news-and-events/technical-articles/battling-bracken-control-and-alleviation-strategies>

⁵ https://businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect/sites/farmingconnect/files/documents/bracken_control.pdf

⁶ Bracken (SIN011) October **2008** <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/127007>

⁷ Bracken management: ecological, archaeological and landscape issues and priorities (TIN047) October **2008** <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/33017>

⁸ Bracken management and control (TIN048) October **2008** <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/35013>

⁹ Bracken control A Guide To Best Practice **2008** <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/Publication%20008%20-%20Bracken%20Control%20-%20A%20Guide%20to%20Best%20Practice.pdf>

¹⁰ The biology and non-chemical control of Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum* (L.) Kuhn HDRA’s **2007** referenced review <https://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/sites/www.gardenorganic.org.uk/files/organic-weeds/pteridium-aquilinum.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.ruralpayments.org/topics/all-schemes/agri-environment-climate-scheme/management-options-and-capital-items/primary-treatment-of-bracken---manual/guidance-for-bracken-management/>

Finding Gwent's Breeding Curlews

A Project Update

Curlews are in such steep decline that they could become extinct as a breeding species in Wales within the next decade. Hay meadows in particular offer them some refuge. In our last newsletter we featured an item about a project to locate breeding Curlews as a starting point for conservation, with a request for information about sightings to be sent to Gwent Ornithological Society. Verity Picken has sent this update on the project findings.

During this year's search 15, possibly 17, pairs of Curlew were found at roughly 25 sites in Gwent. As Curlews often feed quite far from their nest fields (sometimes up to 3km, or even 5km away), it's difficult to be sure of the exact number of pairs or territories. To my absolute delight chicks were seen at five different locations but sadly (spoiler alert) the story doesn't have a happy ending.

But first to the locations. A few areas were home to several territories in fairly close proximity: Trellech held two, perhaps three, pairs, Trefil four, possibly five, and Brynygwenin three. Pairs were also found at Llangybi, Newchurch, Llanwenarth, Blaengavenny, Llanvihangel Crucorney/Llangattock Lingoed and Markham.

Curlews are site-faithful, returning to locations where they've bred in the past, so we had a good idea of where to look but unfortunately lack of observers meant that not all sites where they'd bred previously could be visited.



Picture: Gary Howells

The purpose of the survey was to assess the number of breeding pairs, to locate nest fields and monitor breeding. No attempt was made to approach actual nests. Without the experience, manpower or funding to erect electric fencing around a nest to guard against foxes and badgers (as is done in some locations in the UK) this would have been unwarranted disturbance.

With the help of several very willing local observers, four nest fields were identified, two other fields almost definitely held nests while a seventh nest was suspected in one of three fields. Agitated behaviour (where Curlews chase off Buzzards, gulls and crows or fly up alarming) indicated eggs or chicks at a further three sites. Unfortunately, there simply wasn't the time or manpower to monitor all the pairs adequately so outcomes for most are unknown.

Returning to the good news: I was lucky enough to find three sets of chicks in mid and late June, Gary Howells found a fourth set on 14th July and Andy Shipp saw a well-grown chick with a parent bird on 11th July.

The first chicks seen were in a hayfield below moorland; the incredibly caring farmer agreed to delay mowing until they'd left the field – if only we had more farmers like him! We believe they moved into moorland where they are virtually impossible to follow so we don't know if they and another two, found nearby by Gary Howells, fledged – we can only hope they did. At this site they have to contend with Peregrines as well as gulls and crows; on several occasions we saw Red Kites being mobbed by the parent birds.

The two tiny chicks I came across in a newly-mown field near Brynygwenin were not seen again in spite of repeated searching so I suspect these were predated. A lone Curlew in a nearby nest field in the same area indicated that the eggs or chicks were probably crushed when the field was cut.

Near Trellech a Curlew pair walking along rows of newly mown silage suggested that their nest had suffered a similar fate.

Early silage cutting is one of the main reasons for nest failure and I suspect this accounted for the failure of other pairs in these two areas – and also elsewhere. The pair near Newchurch vanished suddenly in mid-June, probably because any eggs or chicks had been predated.

Two of the three chicks seen near Markham (in a hay field which is always cut late in the year) disappeared, presumably taken by gulls, crows or a mammalian predator. Happily, the lone remaining chick grew big enough to be ignored by, and ignore, avian predators and was seen wing-flapping and jumping off the ground by local observer, Simon Maggs, and myself; dates and field notes give every reason to suggest that this chick fledged successfully but not having seen it in flight we cannot be sure.

The last chick was seen on just one day near Llanvihangel Crucorney by Andy Shipp; it was well-grown but hadn't yet fledged.

Several people became 'local observers', visiting a site near to them and reporting back regularly – the help given by Gary Howells, Simon Maggs, Chris Dyson, Duncan Powell and Mark Heffernan was invaluable. My thanks also go to those farmers who kindly allowed access to their land.

Reports from people replying to my requests for sightings on social media and in the newsletters of 'green' organisations such as Monmouthshire Meadows, Gwent Wildlife Trust and, of course, the Gwent Ornithological Society, helped greatly.



Picture: Gary Howells



Curlew in flight, Gary Howells



Curlew chick, picture scanned from an old slide, Steph Tyler

Curlews are predicted to become extinct as a breeding species in Wales within the next ten years. We're still seeing them because they're long-lived birds (the typical lifespan is 11 years though the oldest recorded lived for 32) but because breeding success is so dire there are not enough young birds to take the place of the older ones when they die. In the UK as a whole we need 10,000 **more** Curlew chicks to fledge **every** year just to stop the decline.

Only when we know where they are can we try to protect them. **Your help next year would be very much appreciated!**

Verity Picken

Email inland Curlew sightings to
curlew@gwentbirds.org.uk

No Mow May Verges

It wasn't just gardens left to bloom in Plantlife's successful No Mow May campaign. Cathie Holland sent these three pictures (right and below) taken in De Clere Way, a residential lane in Trellech, where the neighbours have different opinions on what constitutes an attractive verge. The pictures were taken in the second week of May this year, and it is easy to see which verge is mown weekly (sometimes more), and which is left to grow until the end of August or September when it is cut and cleared. The result is Primroses, Cowslips, Self-heal, Violets, Daisies, Dandelions and more. Cathie says "It's great and also looks in character with its location within a rural setting!"



Further along the lane the weekly cutting continues

Daffodil Bank at Blue Door

In 2021 we held one of the MMG Open Meadows at the home of Martin & Patricia Milling at Blue Door on Far Hill near Llanishen. They told us about their bank of Wild Daffodils, and here it is in full bloom this spring.

Patricia writes that they had been away for a few days and "returned to find that the bank of Wild Daffodils here is better than ever".

If you find something new or unusual in your meadow, or have a story to tell, please send it in to us. We love to hear how our members are getting on, and to share our problems and our successes so we can all learn from our experiences.



Long-horned Bees in Maypole

Bee enthusiast Rosi Rollings has discovered Long-horned Bees in her meadow in Maypole. This is a very exciting find for self-declared 'bee-mad' Rosi, as Long-horned Bees have declined significantly in numbers in recent years, and it is now designated a UK priority species. In Wales they are found mostly near southern coastal areas, although bee expert Roger Ruston has found them inland, in MMG's Kingcoed and a few other places (as described in his article in our newsletter from [Autumn 2018](#).)

Rosi has spotted them regularly this year, seeing as many as eight on each visit to the meadow, over a six-week period from late May, so she is fairly confident that it is a stable community. They were always spotted on Birds-foot Trefoil, as shown in the picture opposite, taken by Rosi.



First Sightings

The photo below left shows a beautiful Broad-leaved Helleborine, a first for Phil Pickering and Isabel MacDonald in their field in the Olchon Valley. The picture shows the progression from bud to flower to seed head on a single stem.

Rachel and Simon Taylor moved to their place near Usk in January 2021, and this year found their first orchid in the hay field – probably a Common Spotted-orchid (from the picture, below right). They are having to work hard to control the bracken that had grown up on their land, so they really deserve this first reward.



Phil and Isabel's Broad-leaved Helleborine



Rachel and Simon's Spotted-orchid

During a survey of Maggie Hamlen's land in Penallt in May, Steph Tyler found these Corky-fruited Water Dropwort (two pictures, right). As Steph said, "Goodness knows how that has arrived!". Since 2014 Maggie's meadow has greatly improved with good management and the introduction of Yellow Rattle. Common Spotted-orchid numbers have doubled since the previous year, and another first this year was this wonderful Southern Marsh-orchid (below).



Last year Maggie collected green hay from a nearby site to strew over a length of bare ground through the meadow, and this year there was a display of Eyebright and Lesser Stitchwort along the line. A great demonstration of the value of green hay.



Southern Marsh-orchid



Corky-fruited Water Dropwort (also above)

Patrick and Sarah Lloyd have had some wonderful successes in their meadow and garden in, Penallt. During a survey, Steph Tyler found this lovely Milkwort (right) as well as Rough Hawkbit and various other species.

Also this year, Patrick and Sarah found ten Common Spotted-orchids in the 'lawn' they had decided not to mow and, even more exciting, another first, a Green-winged orchid (pictured on the next page).

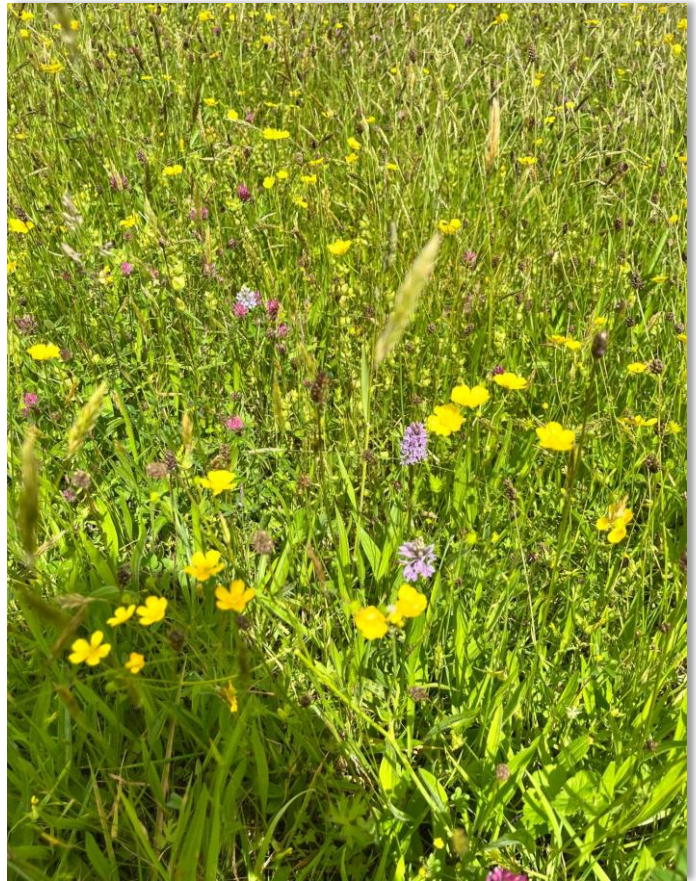


Milkwort

This sudden rush of new species here is likely to be due to a layer of fresh cut green hay from a nearby meadow a few years' ago.



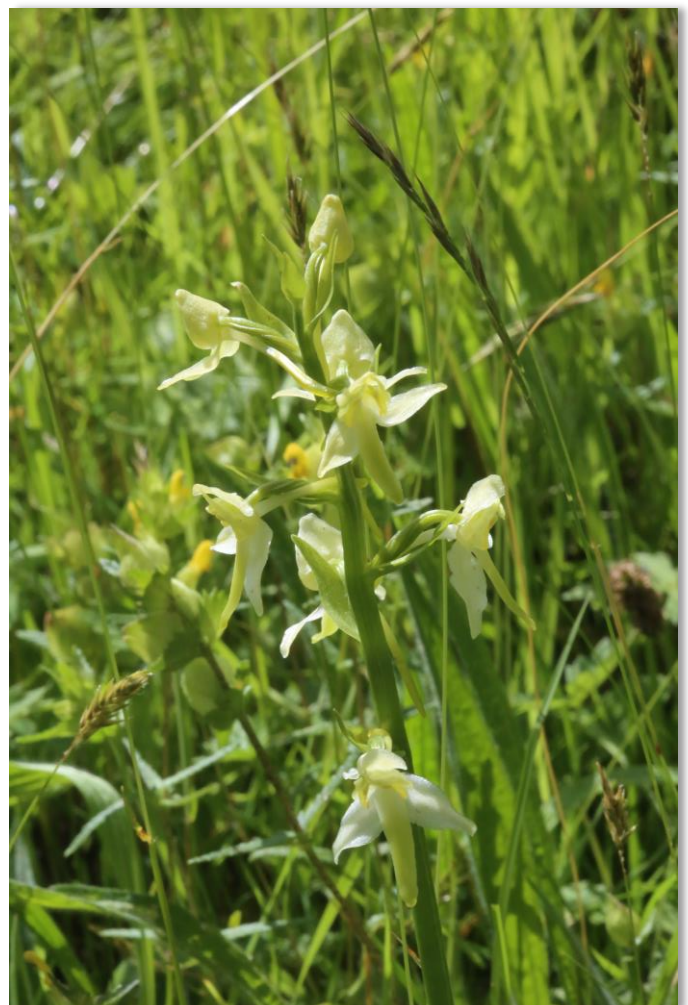
Green-winged Orchid (Patrick and Sarah Lloyd)



Common Spotted-orchids among other flowers in Patrick and Sarah's meadow

At The Beeches on The Narth, Jon Dunkelman reports the appearance of another new orchid species this year – a Greater Butterfly-orchid (right and below).

MMG's Ida's Meadow reserve, about a mile away, is a rich site for these beautiful orchids, but it is the first time one has been seen on the other side of the village, as far as we know. Maybe the seeds were brought back unknowingly from one of the work parties at the reserve – a good reason to volunteer!



Noble Chafer Beetles

Over summer a number of our members took part in the Wye Valley AONB's survey to detect the rare Noble Chafer Beetle in our area. Ellie Baggett, the AONB's Nature Recovery Officer, brought around pheromone traps to attract this special insect.

Noble Chafers are small (about 2 cm long), beautiful beetles with iridescent, metallic-green bodies, speckled with white. Classified as 'nationally scarce', they are normally found in old orchards where they depend on decaying wood for food and shelter. The AONB has chosen this beetle as one of the endangered species they will focus on as part of their nature recovery work, and will develop projects aimed at reversing its decline.

The good news is that although she didn't find any on the Monmouthshire side of the river, Ellie's traps did succeed in Herefordshire, where adult beetles were found in two places, and frass and larvae were present at a third.

Ellie has asked us to pass on her thanks to everyone who helped by hosting one of her traps.



Female adult Noble Chafer beetle found in Ellie's trap



One of the pheromone traps

Congratulations Nicola!

Nicola Bradbear, founder of the Monmouth-based charity Bees for Development and a driving force behind the creation of Bee Friendly Monmouthshire and the annual Bee Festival, has been awarded a well deserved MBE for services to biodiversity in the Queen's Birthday Honours List 2022.

Bees for Development works in over fifty countries advocating simple methods for beekeeping to support essential biodiversity, and to provide sustainable incomes for families in remote locations.

www.beesfordevelopment.org



Grasslands+ and the Terra Carta

Grasslands+ is a coalition of Plantlife, the Bumblebee Conservation Trust and Butterfly Conservation, which came together ahead of COP26, the international climate change conference held in Glasgow last year. Their campaign to



restore the planet's grasslands, savannahs, plains, steppes and meadows has been chosen as one of the case studies in the [Terra Carta Impact Report 2022](#), an initiative spearheaded by the Prince of Wales' Sustainable Markets Initiative, providing a 'roadmap to 2030' for businesses to move towards a sustainable model. The Terra Carta approach is to give fundamental rights and value to nature.

Read the case study here: terracarta.report/case-studies/grasslandsplus

Friends of the Lower Wye

Friends of the Lower Wye is a community group, led by Mike Dunsbee and Nick Day, campaigning to improve conditions for the lower reaches of the river, which as we all know is in a dangerously polluted state. For over a year the group has been pursuing the various bodies involved including the MPs, and local councils, Welsh Water and Natural Resources



Friends of the Lower Wye
Protecting the river's health & wellbeing

Wales. Their philosophy is not just to complain about the pollution and its consequences but to work towards finding and implementing solutions, and they report that they do feel they have made some progress this year.

They have four key aims:

- * Stop all new building developments of intensive poultry units and cease manure spreading: *discussions are ongoing with Avara foods and Tesco over this point*
- * Develop more Regenerative Farming: *all land that leads down to the river bank should be regenerative*
- * One cross border Task Force: *that is the English Environment Agency and Natural Resources Wales working together*
- * A Single River Commission for all the Wye: *similar to that being carried out on the River Tweed*

The Friends are looking to increase their numbers, and consequently their influence. To join the group contact friendsofthelowerwye@gmail.com

Nature Isn't Neat in Llanfoist

A great example of how to promote Nature Isn't Neat was sent in by Graham Harris, secretary of the Usk Conservation and Environment group. Graham writes:

“A few years ago a neighbour and myself complained to MCC [Monmouthshire County Council] about the mowing regime here in Llanfoist and asked them to delay mowing as certain areas supported a great show of Milkmaids/Cuckoo Flower (*Cardamine pratensis*)

“Eventually MCC changed the mowing regime and placed notices excluding certain areas from mowing and you can see from the photos the effect it had on three areas here in Llanfoist.



No Mow in action in Llanfoist

“Notice boards have now been placed in the centre of Llanfoist explaining MCC’s strategy in relation to leaving certain areas unmown at critical times of the year”

Magnificent Meadows Cymru

This three-year project to create and restore flower-rich meadows across Wales, funded by the Welsh Government, comes to an end in December this year.



Run by the Welsh section of national charity Plantlife, the project has achieved many of its goals, despite working through the pandemic years, creating and supporting new meadows groups, running training courses (which MMG benefitted from) and generally promoting wildflower and fungi-rich grasslands. We hope to include a report from their Conservation Officer, Lucia Chmurova, in our next edition. Lucia is moving on to a position with Buglife and we wish her the best of luck in her continuing conservation role.

Our 20th Anniversary Calendar

MMG will be 20 years old in February 2023. To celebrate, we will be holding a special event next summer, and also producing a calendar commemorating some of our highlights from the last 20 years. These will be given free to members over this winter in appreciation of everyone’s support over the years, and they will be available at our events during 2023. The calendar will be generic so can be used for 2023 or 2024.



			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

Custom-made Homes for Wildlife

MMG member Robert Jones says he knows more about natural history than woodwork, but nevertheless makes these wonderful customised bird boxes and other homes for wildlife using recycled timber and non-toxic preservatives. They are tailored to suit the species: a communal dwelling box for sparrows; individual boxes for other small birds, larger owl boxes and bat boxes, all carefully designed to meet their specific needs. The proceeds help to benefit environmental charities too. If you are interested, contact Robert on **01291 420336**.



Right: box for smaller birds

Left: bat box

Below: communal box for sparrows



Dates for your Diary

The list is, of course, liable to change and you should confirm details in advance. Updates will be published on our web site, and by email bulletin to our members, together with activities of interest that we hear about from other organisations.

Wednesday 21st September: Gwent Wildlife Trust AGM on Zoom, with speaker Dave Goulson, Professor of Biology at the University of Sussex, founder of the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, on 'Averting the Insect Apocalypse', 7pm.
[Bookings via GWT web site](#)

Thursday 22nd September: Saving Our Insects by Professor Dave Goulson, 7.30pm, Savoy Theatre, Monmouth presented by Brockweir, Hewelsfield & St Briavels Garden Society and the Parish Grasslands Project, £10 [details on the Savoy web site](#)

Sunday 23rd October: Grassland Fungi Walk in Trellech Wet Meadow and New Grove Meadows, 1:30pm to about 4pm led by Elsa Wood and Jon Dunkelman. See page 7

Thursday 27th October: MMG Autumn Meeting and Social at Llandogo village hall. See page 7

For other events see: **Gwent Wildlife Trust:** www.gwentwildlife.org/whats-on

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

