

Conserving and Restoring Wildflower-rich Grasslands in Monmouthshire

In This Issue

From the Chair	1
MMG News	2
Andrew Cormack	4
News from Wet Meadow	5
Surveys in 2023	5
2024 AGM/Spring Social	6
The State of Nature Report	6
Grazing Management	7
Gwent Barn Owl Initiative	8
Gilwern Community Meadow	9
New Members	10
Grasslands as a Carbon Store	11
Members' Meadows	12
Monmouthshire Rare Plants Register	16
News from Around	17
Dates for your Diary	18

Contact Us

MMG Chair: Rachel Morgan

*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)*

From the Chair

As we start another season of meadow activities, I wonder how are we all feeling about the future. From a meadow conservation point of view, at least, there are many things to give us hope.

In the early days of Monmouthshire Meadows, meadow management was rarely talked about outside conservation organisations. Very few people were aware of the magnitude of loss of this traditional habitat. These days, when we take out our stall to meet the public there is a much greater level of awareness. Far more people are managing their gardens and grassland for wildlife, and there is a growing acceptance of the message that Nature Isn't Neat. The concept of regenerative farming is taking root and the rewilding movement, for all its good intentions, has accepted that we are far too distant from a natural state of wildness to just let things develop without intervention.

The conservation message has never been stronger. There's a long way to go, of course, but compared with a few years ago it feels much more positive.

And yet, the wider picture seems bleak. As the 2023 State of Nature report points out, we live in one of the most nature depleted countries on earth. Climate change is occurring even faster than anticipated, and the



Down in the Sward – Trystan Davies took this picture showing an impressive variety of flora in his garden meadow near Devauden

state of the River Wye is an unfolding, but not irreversible, tragedy. So how should we feel about our efforts in Monmouthshire Meadows Group?

A phrase comes to mind that was common on badges and banners in the early days of action for the environment: if you aren't part of the solution you are part of the problem.

We know that conservation efforts do have a positive effect, and without them so many species would already be lost. MMG has more members than ever, and together we are making a difference.

We can focus on our small area where we have control, and do whatever we can to conserve and enhance the little bit of nature around us. The rewards are worth it – the glorious sight of a flower-rich meadow in June.

MMG News

A Review of our 20th Year

2023 was our anniversary and we celebrated in style in July with a bring-and-share party at Laura Tenison's wonderful mediaeval barn at Wern-Y-Cwm Farm, with wildflower walks and stunning views of the Skirrid. The location was perfect, and we can't thank Laura, Saran and the team enough for all the work they put into the evening.

There are photographs of Laura's incredible place on her web site: www.wonderfulescapes.co.uk.

We also produced a calendar to mark our success, which we sent out to members (it can be used any year so if you haven't received yours, let the committee know as we have a few spare).

The spring AGM at Cross Ash featured talks on meadow invertebrates from Ian Rabjohns and Roger Rushton, and the Autumn get-together was all about conservation grazing, with a film from the Exmoor Ponies

Society. This was followed by a useful discussion led by Joe Ryder of Gwent Wildlife Trust (who now has the care of 'our' Exmoor ponies, Jacinth and Jemima)

and Alex Crawley who, together with his wife Emily, runs Conservation Grazing (more on Alex's service on page 7)

Our main event every year is our Open Meadows day. In 2023 we had a full day with four meadows to visit around Trostrey and Gwehelog, with hosts Christopher and Alicia Guinness at Oak Farm, Saran Allot-Davey at her fields in Trostrey, Mary and Jim Neal at Glenview Farm, and Rachel and Simon Taylor at The Duffryn. Each site offered something different – an orchard meadow, a hidden pond, wildflower-rich marshy grassland and, of course, some spectacular views. We are very grateful to our hosts who went out of their way to make guests feel welcome.

Our stall and display made an appearance at quite a few events in 2023 starting with the Seed Swap in February, in aid of the [Heritage Seed Library](#). This was followed by the Wye July festival organised by Friends of the Lower Wye (doing a fantastic job of raising awareness of the plight of our struggling river). (More news about the Friends on page 17). In September we were at the ACE Festival Monmouth organised by Action on Climate Emergency, where we arranged scything demonstrations run by Andrea Gilpin, to highlight the advantages – both environmental and for health – of managing grassland by hand.



Our 20th Birthday Party inside the barn at Wern-Y-Cwm
(picture: Rhian Williams-Flew)

In April we teamed up with **Chepstow Walkers are Welcome** for a meadows walk as part of their Chepstow Walking Festival, which after a walk around Cwmcarvan took in some flower identification tips from Steph Tyler in New Grove Meadow.



Wildlife spotting at Saran's hidden pond, during our Open Meadows day 2023 (picture: Clare Adamson)

In June, Steph led a plant identification course at Trellech Wet Meadow (Steph's courses are always very popular, with good reason.) Once again we ran two scything courses, this time our hosts were Ty Mawr Convent and our tutor, as before, Andrea Gilpin of **Wild Meadow**.

In October we sent our mycology experts along to New Grove Meadow to support Gwent Wildlife Trust's very successful Fungi Identification Day. New Grove is one of the best wildflower meadows in Monmouthshire, and it also has an impressive array of grassland fungi.

Throughout the year we were busy looking after our own meadow reserves: Kingcoed Meadow near Raglan, Ida's Meadow near The Narth and, of course,

Wet Meadow in Trellech. In particular a lot of effort has gone into creating conditions for a diversity of wildlife in Wet Meadow, with the restoration of one pond and creation of another. We are very grateful to all our volunteer helpers at our work parties, and in

particular the team from the Wye Valley Natural Landscape (formerly AONB) led by Lucinda James.

Our Fungi book continued to sell well all year, and at the time of writing (February 2024) there are just a few copies of the second edition remaining.

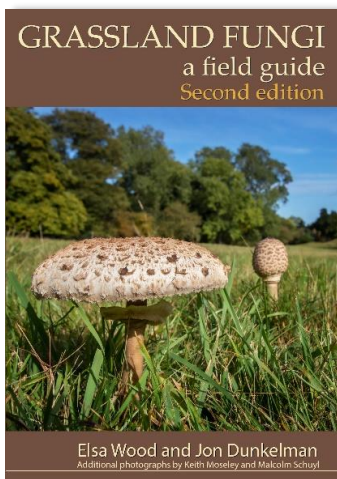
Into 2024

Now we look forward to another busy year. Our plans include our AGM in April, at Dingestow Village Hall with speaker Sam Bosanquet, one of the country's leading experts on mosses and lichens but for us Sam will be talking about his experiences restoring old grasslands to a more natural state at his family estate (details of our AGM are on page 6>

Our Open Meadows this year will be on Sunday 9th June – there will be more details on our web site in due course. As always, we hope to take our stall to other events to talk to the public at large, and all these events will be circulated to members in our email bulletins.



Plant identification with Steph Tyler, admiring the Dyer's Greenweed on Trellech Wet Meadow (picture: Jan Stevenson)



Training Courses

This year we will be repeating our popular scything courses with Andrea Gilpin, and holding a Plant Identification walk with Steph Tyler. Members who have already expressed an interest in these will be contacted first before we open bookings to others, so get in touch with Marilyn if you want your name to go on the waiting list.

Our training courses are subsidised as a service to our members, as we wish to encourage use of sustainable methods of meadow management, particularly scything which is ideal for smaller patches and allows for cutting at different times to allow later flowering plants to flourish.

Can you Help?

We welcome suggestions on future activities, events and courses, and above all we appreciate help. As you know, MMG is run entirely by volunteers and, like all voluntary community groups, we are unable to do everything we would like. Contact anyone on the committee if you have time or a skill to offer.



Learning to scythe at Ty Mawr convent - no Scabious were hurt during this activity! (picture: Clare Adamson)

Andrew Cormack



Andrew at an MMG work party at Ida's Meadow, 2016

Andrew and Janet Cormack joined the Meadows Group in 2010. I remember well going to visit them at their home in Abergavenny where they had a grassy bank that they wanted to make more wildlife friendly. I have many fond memories of Andrew and Janet attending various work tasks such as bramble-bashing on an overgrown field in the Whitebrook Valley and they regularly attended indoor meetings when Andrew's busy work schedule allowed. Andrew was, along with Janet, heavily involved with Gwent Wildlife Trust, often working as a volunteer up at Strawberry Cottage Wood in the Llanthony Valley and elsewhere. They were active members of the Gwent Ornithological Society, Andrew being treasurer for some years and Janet newsletter editor. Andrew became passionate too about moths and butterflies and regularly moth-trapped in their garden. A highlight for Andrew was finding a Silurian moth in their garden – a rare moth confined to a few upland areas of Monmouthshire and adjacent Herefordshire.

I knew of Andrew's great interest in, and care for, all things natural but it wasn't until I went to his very well attended funeral in Abergavenny after his very untimely and far too early death on 11 April 2023, that I learnt so much more about him. He was truly an amazing man. He had degrees in mathematics, the humanities and law and had led an active career, latterly with Jisc as Chief Regulatory Advisor, working across many aspects of legal and policy issues relating to networked services and education. He was very well respected world-wide.

Steph Tyler

News from Wet Meadow

The Trellech Wet Meadow reserve continues to delight visitors and local residents with Red Kites regularly seen over the fields when the hay is being cut and a wonderful flock of over 100 Goldfinches feeding on knapweed seeds last summer.

Dick Coates has been busy sorting out a weir on the inflow stream to the new pond whilst at the restored old pond, long dormant seed has produced a display of Water Plantain, Water Crowfoot and other aquatic plants with at least five species of dragon and damselfly utilizing the pond.

Work parties attended by a few MMG members and a group of AONB volunteers have done a great job tackling many tasks such as controlling brambles in the new hedges, raking up bracken and coppicing some hazel to allow more light into the old pond.



Azure Damselfly in the restored pond at Wet Meadow (picture: Clare Catto)

A late hay crop followed by aftermath grazing by sheep continues to keep the meadows in good heart. But we are considering grazing by cattle in the boggy areas to control coarser growth and allow sedges and Heath Spotted-orchids to flourish better.

Sadly, an old birch tree with Witches Broom galls, as shown on the display board at the reserve entrance, has fallen but it will be allowed to rot in situ providing fungi and invertebrates with a 'home'.

Steph Tyler

Stop Press! Great excitement as we have just found frogspawn in both ponds, with particularly good amounts in the 'old' pond.



A charm of Goldfinches feeding on Knapweed seeds at Wet Meadow (picture: Ray Francis)

Surveys in 2023

Between us (Steph Tyler, Elsa Wood and Sheelagh Kerry) we visited over 30 grasslands belonging to new members in 2023 – some of them garden meadows but many larger areas from single fields to farms with well over 50 acres.

It is always a privilege to see new sites and to listen to the aspirations of members to improve their grasslands for plants and other wildlife. We 'found' some wonderful sites, well worthy of being Local Wildlife Sites and we will visit two of these in June on our Open Day.

At one site at Gwehelog the members had grazed their various fields with neighbour's sheep for many

years but decided to have a year with no sheep during the spring and summer. They were rewarded with so many species including orchids being able to flower and set seed for the first time in years.

Please let us know if you still have not had a visit although we do plan to visit new members in May or June. Also, if it is a long time since the initial survey and you would like us to see how things have progressed, please get in touch.

Steph Tyler

steph_tyler2001@hotmail.com

AGM / Spring Social 2024

This year's AGM is on Wednesday 17th April at Dingestow Village Hall. The AGM will start at 7pm (doors open 6.30pm). A buffet supper will be served at around 8pm.

The AGM will be followed by a talk by our guest speaker, Sam Bosanquet, on ***Old Lands: 17 years of farmed grassland restoration***.

Sam is a well-known naturalist and ecologist, particularly for his knowledge of bryophytes (mosses, liverworts and hornworts), lichens, fungi and moths. He has contributed to many publications, including the definitive field guide Mosses and Liverworts of Britain and Ireland. He is also the manager of the 180 acre family estate near Dingestow, known as Old Lands.

Sam will discuss how his family have worked with local farmers to increase plant and insect diversity on the land, seeing some fields transition to species-richness while others remain "stubbornly grassy". His talk will include grassland fungi, introducing wildflower seed, ammonia pollution (one of his particular interests is the impact of this chemical on biodiversity) and tree planting.

Fleabane being deliberately left as a late nectar source during hay mowing at Old Lands (Sam Bosanquet)

Booking: The cost of the supper is £20 to members, £23 to non-members (including wine); members can attend the AGM and talk at no cost, non-members £3.

Please book in advance – contact Marilyn or use the booking form [on our web site](#). The minutes of our 2023 AGM can be downloaded from the same page.

Dingestow Village Hall: The hall can be found on Google Maps, postcode NP25 4BH, or What3Words [///forgets.turkeys.connected](#) (the car park entrance). The hall is on the main road through the village and there is a car park directly opposite the hall, on the other side of the road.



The State of Nature Report 2023: Wales



The State of Nature partnership is a collaborative project bringing together the work of over 60 of the UK's leading conservation organisations in order to improve the collection, collation and efficient use of data from biodiversity recording and monitoring. Since 2013, their regular reports, produced every three years (with a slight delay over the pandemic period), have provided detailed, accurate information about the state of nature in each country of the UK, and vital evidence for anyone involved in wildlife conservation.

The 2023 report for Wales shows that since careful monitoring began in 1994, the numbers of Welsh species have declined on average by 20%. That is a shocking figure for a period of less than 30 years. In fact, one in six of our species is at risk of extinction, including plants

and animals such as Fen Orchid, Water Vole and Sand Lizard. In the UK as a whole, over half of flowering plants have declined in their range since 1970.

The report details what appear to be the main reasons for this decline, and there are no surprises:

- Significant and ongoing changes in the way we manage our land for agriculture
- The ongoing effects of climate change
- Pollution - despite a reduction in emissions of many pollutants in recent decades, others continue to have a severe impact on sensitive habitats, as those of us observing the Wye and Usk know only too well

The State of Nature Report for Wales 2023 is available to download from the Partnership's web site:

stateofnature.org.uk/countries/wales

Grazing Management - Hoof-powered Nature Restoration



Alex and Emily Crawley launched Grazing Management in 2020 with the aim of using their own animals to take on contract work helping to restore

wildflower meadows, peatlands and heathlands. Offering this service, they are building up a successful and profitable business. Already they have worked with various conservation organisations, including providing cattle for grazing on Cleddon Bog for the joint AONB/NRW project to conserve that precious area of peatland, and on Beacon Hill near Trellech, a nationally important area of lowland heathland.

Based in Gloucestershire, Alex is already working with landowners from Parish Grasslands Project and Dean Meadows Group, and is keen to extend his offer to partners on this side of the Wye. We asked him to provide some details about his service:

Who we are

Grazing Management offer bespoke conservation grazing for habitat restoration projects. We love seeing big grazing animals back in the landscape, these key ecosystem engineers over time can support a huge biodiversity of wildflowers, insects, birds and other animals. We do this using a tailored mix of rare native breed cattle, native breed sheep, bagot goats or even pigs, dependent upon the site.

How we do it

We do this with a mix of 21st century technology of no-fence collars and remote 3G cameras and more traditional breeds at low stocking rates with a people focus on landowners and volunteer livestock checkers. We move our 'flying herd and flock' from site to site to suit the restoration aims.

What we do

Have a look at the website [Grazing Management Ltd](https://www.grazingmanagement.co.uk) for some of our case studies which include heathland, peatbog, and wildflower

meadow restoration projects. We also support removal of non-native invasive species such as Himalayan Balsam. This is often for partners such as the Wye Valley AONB, Natural Resources Wales, Severn Trent and even for the Grand Designs house of the Year 2021. We have worked closely with the Parish Grasslands Project (PGP) and the Dean Meadows Group (DMG) and look forward to working with Monmouthshire Meadows Group.

Funding

Although we are farmers, we focus on habitat restoration as opposed to meat production (although occasionally we may have some for sale). As such, we work with landowners and organisations to secure funding for the conservation grazing services. For example, we conservation graze for landowners with PGP and DMG who want to restore meadows and we secure funding separately to pay the grazing/management costs. We would look to replicate this with Monmouthshire meadows where funding is available.

What we look for in a potential project

We ideally need sites with:

- A secure perimeter fence
- A minimum of ten acres
- A water supply of some sort
- A landowner who is regularly able to do the very basic daily check (basic training provided)
- And importantly, landowners who share a passion for restoring wildlife and caring for animals

We will then look to see what funding options may be available. If you think you may have a site that could use conservation grazing, please get in touch and we will see what we can do: Info@grazingmanagement.co.uk
www.grazingmanagement.co.uk



Greater Gwent Barn Owl Initiative

Richard M Clarke

The Goldcliff Ringing Group's *Greater Gwent Barn Owl Initiative* aims to help maintain and, where possible, increase the population of Barn Owls in the Greater Gwent area and to do this by:

- promoting nest boxes where habitat is suitable, but where existing nest sites are at a premium;
- surveying, monitoring, recording and reporting nesting; and,
- raising wider awareness amongst local communities about the species.

The initiative started on the Caldicot Levels but with some grant support has expanded in the southern half of former Gwent and has more recently been extended into other areas, including the Usk valley and Trellech and surrounds.

To date some 130 sites are included in the initiative with most having been established relatively recently. Despite this, some good early progress has already been made, with seven active nest sites in 2021 increasing to 23 in 2023 with a further eight roost sites.

The positive cooperation and engagement of landowners/farmers has been key to success, these include NRW and the Gwent Wildlife Trust. More recently some members of the Monmouthshire Meadows Group have become involved.

In going forward the initiative would like to hear from anyone who has recently seen Barn Owls on their land.

We would be very happy to offer practical advice and assistance on how to encourage Barn Owls to nest at suitable sites.

You can contact the initiative by e-mailing - surveys@gwentbirds.org.uk.



The habitat requirements of the Barn Owl

- Open countryside for hunting.
- Ideally, permanent areas of rough grassland, which might include patches, field margins/ditch sides/young plantation woodlands etc.
- Rough grassland that is a tussocky mix of native grass species long, thick and matted.
- Deep grassland litter-layer (ideal 7cm/3") to provide cover for the Barn Owl's prey species – mostly Field Voles, Common Shrews and Wood Mice.

Creating a Community Meadow at Upper Common, Gilwern

It was in 2022 that a group of local people in Gilwern, a village in north-west of the county within Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, came up with a suggestion that their common be managed as a wildflower meadow.

They contacted Monmouthshire County Council, who are responsible for managing the Common, to discuss the possibility of this, as part of the Council's Nature Isn't Neat scheme. The Council was positive about the proposal and agreed to support the scheme, adjusting their management of the site as necessary. Stephanie Tyler and Elsa Wood were asked to assess the Common's conservation value as a starting point, and a survey was done in July 2022. At the time, much of the area had already been mown, but there were remaining patches where it was possible to identify species. There was very little coarse grass (Cocksfoot and False Oat Grass) and fine grasses, especially Red Fescue, were widespread. The sward was found to contain many other flowering plants, including a pleasing amount of Lesser Stitchwort, Knapweed, Cat's-ear and Lesser Hawkbit. The conclusion was that, with eight species indicative of good quality neutral grassland, the site was already of local conservation importance, and had great potential with the right management regime.



A plan was drawn up to leave the area uncut from the end of March 2023 until August so that the meadow could grow. Paths were to be created, meandering around and through the meadow. Mowing the whole area was to start from mid-August ensuring that the cut material was removed. Further mowing would take place in the autumn to mimic aftermath grazing, leaving the grass short by the end of March 2024 to start the process again. A few small areas with much Knapweed were to be left unmown in August to provide pollen and nectar for late-flying butterflies, bees and other pollinators.

Following further consultation with the County Council, the Duke of Beaufort's Estate and local residents, the plan was agreed and a start was made, with the plants allowed to grow and paths cut through for walkers.

Unfortunately, in July 2023, a tractor drove onto the Common and, before he could be stopped, illegally mowed the land (presumably not agreeing with the Nature Isn't Neat approach). Despite this setback, the Common was later cut properly and the cuttings removed. A few small strips were scarified and Yellow Rattle, Tufted Vetch and Ox-eye Daisy seeds sown to further diversify the site, all from local sources. Children from Gilwern School helped with raking prior to sowing the seeds.

Andrew Baker, representing the local group who initiated the project, says it has been generally very well received, with children and adult walkers using the paths every day.

Andrew reports: "Botanically it has been a great success with a wide range of species, which has attracted good numbers of Meadow Brown butterflies and Bumblebees. The paths have proved very popular with walkers and with the children particularly on the way home from school.

"I recently spent time with a class from Gilwern School at the meadow searching for and identifying the

species of fauna and flora present, as part of their study of natural history."

The flowers they found included Knapweed, Field Scabious, Yarrow, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Meadow Vetchling, Cat's-ear, Rough Hawkbit, Red Clover, and Cowslips.

Monmouthshire Meadows Group wish Gilwern continuing success with this inspirational project, and hope that many other villages follow their example.

Help and Advice on the MMG Web Site

Looking for advice on managing your meadow, or where to find contractors to help with cutting and collecting, fencing and other meadow tasks, or perhaps you need a source of local provenance seeds? Take a look at our Help and Advice section on our web site. We have links to various advice sites, and a list of Contractors and Suppliers that our members have used and recommended. If you have anyone you can recommend to add to our list, let us know.

www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk advice and information pages

Welcome to our New Members

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

Sue Harrison, Crickhowell	Pam Haynes, Llanellen
Tobias Parker, Bristol	Neil Sinfield, Brockweir
Jill Formaggia, Llantillio Crossenny	Jim Lloyd, Whitchurch
Imelda McLoughlin, Llanfoist	Moira Shepherdson, Monkswood
Leah Green, Usk	Beatrice Newbery, Lydart
Tom Constable, Llanfihangel Ystern Llewern	Alex Cooper, Penyclawdd
Sue Derrington	Sophie Scott, Rockfield
Denis Parkes, St Arvans	Clare Downing, Llanrothal
Zena Smith, Llanishen	Caroline Holt-Wilson, Raglan
Jan Cogdon, Catbrook	Victor Warren, Pontypool
Sarah Bowden, Catbrook	Trellech School PTFA
Ashley Butler, Monmouth	James Collett, Bristol
Lucy Padfield, Llangattock	Doug and Sue Hilton, Penallt
Emma Walker, Chepstow	Gilly Jenks, Cardiff
Rhys Clewer, Glascoed	Tim Rathbone, Upper Llanover
Trystan Davies, Devauden	Lynn Drever, Chepstow
Laura Singer, Llandogo	Llanishen Village Hall
Henry Hazell, Llanhennock	Deborah Cooper, Llanvair Discoed
Debbie Owen, Llangwm	

Membership of MMG is on a rolling year basis, with reminders sent out twice a year, in spring and autumn. With numbers increasing year on year, we have been able to maintain our recommended membership donation of £10 a year. If you have any queries about your membership, contact our Membership Secretary, Marilyn Dunkelman (details on the front page of this newsletter) or use the Contact Us page of our web site www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk/contact-us

Grasslands as a Carbon Store

Just how important are grasslands compared with woodland in mitigating climate change? This question has arisen many times within MMG, and in July 2023 Plantlife tackled the topic in a briefing document which summarised the findings relating to the potential for grassland to play a role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and sequestering carbon.

Permanent grasslands are significant carbon stores, and the more species present the better. It is estimated that in Great Britain, permanent grasslands store more than two billion tons of carbon to a depth of 100 cm. 90% of the carbon present is stored in the soil and the roots of plants, rather than above ground, and deep-rooted plants and legumes are particularly useful. The mycorrhiza of fungi in the soil also holds carbon. Disturbing the soil and intensive land management practices, such as over-fertilising and ploughing, can release this carbon. Conversion of grassland into arable farmland can cause a 59% decline in soil carbon.

Yet the importance of this is generally underestimated in environmental planning. In particular, the amount of carbon stored deeper in the soil is often overlooked when comparing sequestration across different habitats. While mature broadleaf woodlands will store more carbon overall than grasslands, much of this will be above ground in the trees and plants. As a result, woodland is more susceptible to risks such as fire, pests and disease, which release much of the stored carbon. Grasslands can be a far more reliable store due to the proportion of carbon that is held underground. There are studies that suggest that some semi-natural grassland soil carbon levels can even exceed that of

woodland, although there are many factors that can affect this (such as the type of woodland, whether trees will be felled and how the timber is used).

Inappropriate tree planting schemes on species-rich grassland can release large amounts of carbon.

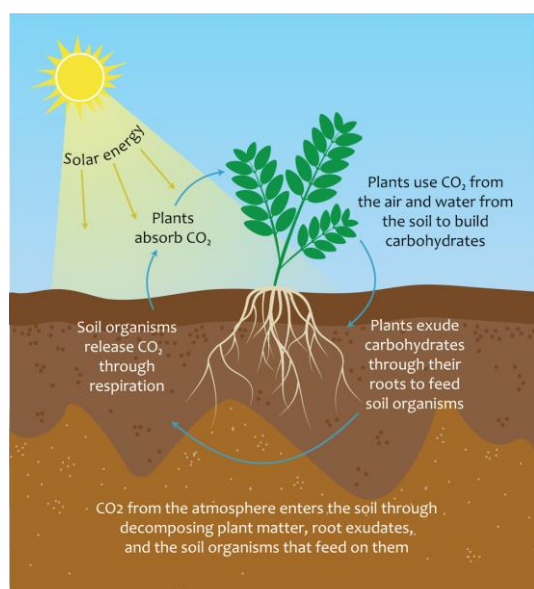
These schemes can do more harm than good, particularly in the short term as it can be many years before the amount of carbon lost can be recovered by the effect of the trees (quite apart from the other effects of loss of biodiversity when species-rich grassland is destroyed).

The importance of undisturbed ground is also overlooked. In agricultural terms “permanent grassland” includes land which is regularly ploughed and re-seeded, although these actions release large quantities of carbon.

Practices which reduce species diversity also diminish the potential to hold carbon. Pesticides reduce the amount and variety of plant life. Artificial fertilisers inhibit the fungal mycorrhiza through which many plants obtain important nutrition. Creatures such as microbes, ants, earthworms and other fauna play their part in facilitating carbon sequestration in the soil, and are reduced by chemicals and soil disturbance. The rich biodiversity and consequent amount of carbon held takes decades to build up again. Nevertheless, Plantlife’s report concludes that there is great potential to increase the usefulness of grasslands by improving biodiversity and understanding the role of plant variety in managing carbon in grassland.

If you are interested in some of the statistics associated with carbon storage in different environments, there is more detail in Plantlife’s report, linked below, together with a list of their sources:

www.plantlife.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Grasslands-as-a-Carbon-Store.pdf



How carbon cycles into and out of soil. Jocelyn Lavallee, CC BY-ND
Image from theconversation.com/soil-carbon-is-a-valuable-resource-but-all-soil-carbon-is-not-created-equal-129175

Members' Meadows and First Sightings

A Wealth of Orchids in Last Year's Meadows

These orchids (pictured right) arrived early at Oak Farm in Gwehelog where Christopher Guinness took this photograph on 18th May. Luckily there were still plenty to see at our Open Meadows day three weeks later.



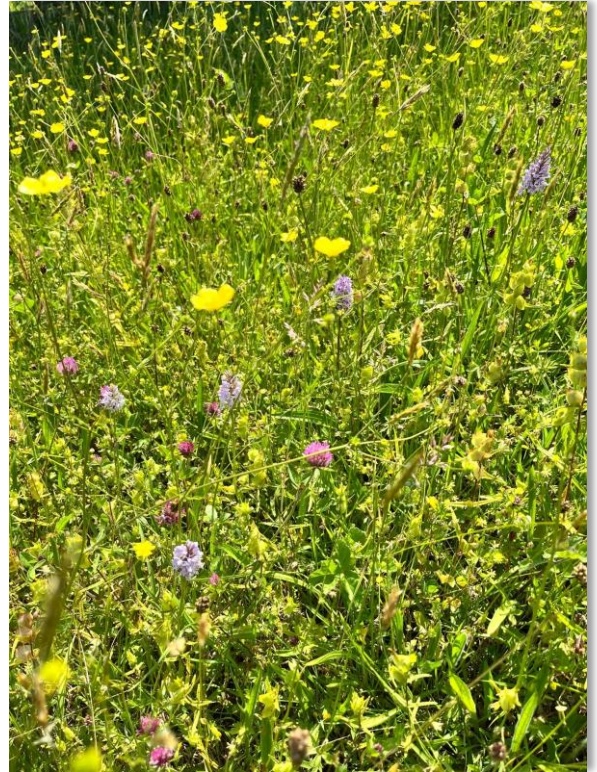
Left: This picture was also taken in May - Green-winged Orchids do usually appear earlier in the year than the Spotted-orchids. This appeared in David Llewellyn's garden in Lydart, a first sighting for this species in his fields.

Jan Cogdon was lucky enough to find this Bee Orchid among her Flag Irises, another first sighting (pictured right). Bee Orchids are enigmatic flowers – they have a habit of appearing and disappearing, and you never know when and where they will turn up. They are often found in disturbed areas such as meadows and pastures, road and railway verges and abandoned industrial and building sites.



Another great first sighting was these Green-winged Orchids in Maggie Hamlen's fields in Penallt (left). These are a great find. There grow in numbers at the Gwent Wildlife Trust's reserves at New Grove Meadow near Trellech, and Pentwyn Farm in Penallt, but those are the top two sites in Monmouthshire. Every site counts for these nationally threatened plants. The detail of the greenish lines on the upper petal/hood can be clearly seen in the second photograph.

While we are looking at orchids, Trystan Davies had a truly impressive display of Twayblades this year in his meadow near Devaudan (below left) and Patrick and Sarah Lloyd have increased the number of Common Spotted-orchids in their small meadow at Penallt from 13 in 2022 to 32 (below right). Seeing numbers grow like this year on year is one of the great satisfactions we get after the work put into our meadows.



It's Not Just Orchids!

There are many other exciting things to find in your grassy areas.

Below left: Tim Moss reported his success saying "Just wanted to share this photo of our first Yellow Rattle, grown from your seeds. We keep on finding little pockets of them planted around the meadows. They look fantastic in all the sunshine we're having."

It's very pleasing to know we were able to help with this!

Then there are the early spring flowers that brighten up our lives after a long, wet winter. Steve Hoselitz of Gwehelog sent this picture in spring 2023 (below right), commenting that it was the best display of Lady's Smock (Cuckoo Flower) he had had for years.



Steve also sent in some pictures of his prolific display of Cowslips from his garden (right). (That's enough to make anyone plagued with greedy rabbits quite jealous!)



Martin and Pat Milling have a garden meadow at their home in Far Hill. In early September it featured these wild Colchicums (otherwise known as Meadow Saffron or Naked Lady) (left).



Before after pictures showing the abundance of Yellow Rattle that appeared within two years at Alison Jenkin's field in Itton. The first was the start of their meadow-making project in 2021 (left), the second from 2023 (below).



Trystan Davies also sent this picture of a lovely, bright display of Rough Hawkbit (right)



To finish off this section, some meadow views

A beautiful mixture of wild meadow flowers from Tom Constable (right)



Pip Morrison sent an update on his stunning fields at Crosshands (below, right). The photograph shows the extent of Dyer's Greenweed, together with orchids, Ox-eye Daisies and a host of other flowers. Pip comments "the field is completely golden from one side to the other"



Apologies to the people who sent pictures that we have not been able to include this time.

If you find something new or unusual in your meadow, or have a story to tell, please send it in to us. Photos of new arrivals, before and after shots, or just a story you can share. 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.

Fungi Firsts

On to a couple of fungi first-sightings. There was great excitement in the Dunkelman household when Jon found these Papillate Waxcaps in his field. This is a species he and Elsa had not been able to find for the last edition of our Grassland Fungi field guide, making it a very special discovery, rarely seen (right).



Finally Maggie Hamlin discovered this weird looking fungi in her field, not seen on her land before (left). She identified it as a Morel using our field guide.

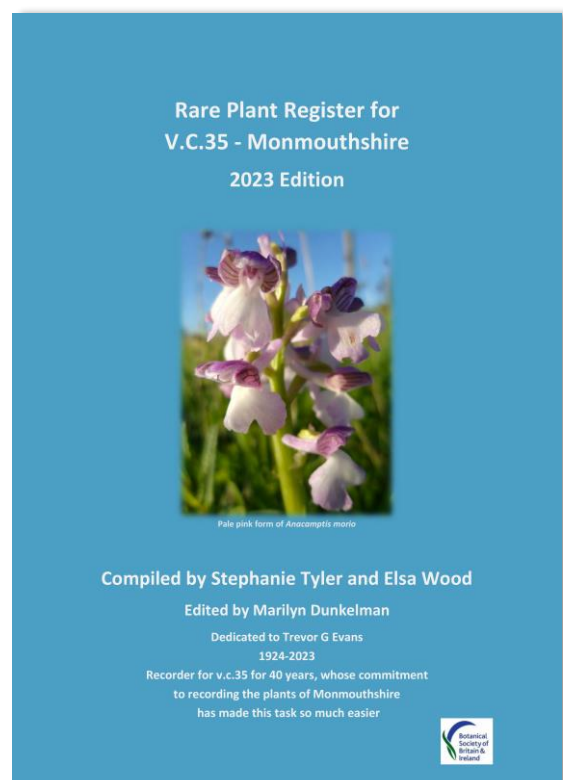
Monmouthshire Rare Plants Register

A new issue of the Rare Plants Register for the vice-county of Monmouthshire, compiled by the County Botanical Recorders Stephanie Tyler and Elsa Wood, was published in October 2023. Steph and Elsa produced the last version in 2019, which in turn updated the original register from 2007 compiled by Trevor Evans.

Wales was the first UK country to produce a register for each vice-county, with the aim of informing statutory agencies and local authorities when considering future plans for their areas.

The register lists species that are considered rare or scarce in the county, or threatened at a national level, together with records of sightings in Monmouthshire since 1970. With 386 entries, it represents a great dedication to surveying, compiling and checking results over the last few years. The team has already started work on the fourth edition!

The register is available to download from the BSBI web site: bsbi.org/monmouthshire



Weatherman Walking

Watch out for the new season of Weatherman Walking with Derek Brockway on BBC Wales. It should feature Steph Tyler with some of our members and their garden meadows – the production team came to our area to film last summer (although we didn't get to meet the Weatherman himself)..

All Change

The team behind the local campaign to save the River Wye, Mike Dunsbee & Nick Day who formed Friends of the Lower Wye around three years ago, have joined forces with their counterpart in the upper valley to form **Friends of the River Wye**. Nick and Mike have done a fantastic job of publicising the plight of the Wye, with political campaigning, events such as the Wye July festival and citizen science projects monitoring the pollution levels of the river. They will continue to hold to account the companies, organisations and politicians with responsibility for the crisis.

Meanwhile, the Wye Valley AONB has become the **Wye Valley National Landscape**, in line with the change of branding for AONB's across the UK. Their small but very effective team has been tremendously helpful to MMG by bringing their

volunteer group to help with work parties at Wet Meadow. They also operate grant schemes for those within the National Landscape area – information [can be found on their web site](#). Many members will have met Ellie Baggett, their former Nature Recovery Officer, who managed both the grant funding and projects such as monitoring for Noble Chafer Bees. We wish Ellie great success in her new role with Plantlife. For grant enquiries now, contact their Community Links officer, Lucinda James.

Pasture for Life

Pasture for Life is the not-for-profit association that champions the virtues of grass-based farming and meat production.

They are offering free mentoring and events to support farmers within the Wye Valley National Landscape area. Details on the poster below, and on their web site

www.pastureforlife.org/marches-programme

Jean Sadler

We were very saddened to hear recently of the sudden, unexpected death of Jean Sadler last September, a member who managed her pasture and marshy hollow at Lower Meend Farm in Penallt together with her daughter Josie and their family. Josie and Jean planned together how to improve the biodiversity on their land, and Josie says that she will continue this work, and that she and the family will be "treading very lightly, for the benefit of the flora and fauna". We send our deep condolences to Jean's family and wish them the very best for their future at the farm, where they will have their memories of Jean.

Want to boost profits and biodiversity on your farm?

Do you farm in the Malvern Hills, Shropshire Hills, or Wye Valley National Landscapes?

Sign up now by visiting pastureforlife.org, scan the QR code or email us at marches@pastureforlife.org



Join our FREE programme of farmer-led mentoring and events and learn how to maximise pasture as a feed source for your animals for the benefit of both your business and biodiversity.

Photo: Wye Organic, certified Pasture for Life

The programme is being run by Pasture for Life and funded by the Farming in Protected Landscapes.



Dates for your Diary

The list is liable to change and you should confirm details in advance. Updates and new additions will be published on our web site, and by email bulletin to our members.

Thursday 14th March: MMG Work Party at Trellech Wet Meadow

Sunday 17th March: Local Wildlife Site Owner's Event run by Gwent Wildlife Trust, 10am to 1pm in Usk. An invite-only event to which MMG members are invited - [details and booking](#) on the GWT web site Events page

Wednesday 17th April: MMG AGM and Spring Social Dingestow Village Hall, with speaker Sam Bosanquet on "Old Lands: 17 years of farmed grassland restoration near Dingestow" Doors open 6.30pm for 7pm start

Saturday 20th April: Monmouthshire Botany Group walk, venue to be announced (see below)

Saturday 18th May: Monmouthshire Botany Group walk, venue to be announced (see below)

Sunday 9th June: MMG Open Meadows Day - a full day of meadow visits with guided walks, details to follow

Saturday 29th June: Monmouthshire Botany Group walk, venue to be announced (see below)

Saturday 20th July: Monmouthshire Botany Group walk, venue to be announced (see below)

Saturday 17th August: Monmouthshire Botany Group walk, venue to be announced (see below)

Saturday 8th September: Monmouthshire Botany Group walk, venue to be announced (see below)

Monmouthshire Botany Group: Botany Walks

The programme is provisional as some venues may be changed. Days start at 10am continuing until about 3-4pm. All days are for helping to improve ID skills and for recording. Booking is essential, contact [Steph Tyler via MMG](#). Further details on the [BSBI web site](#)

Other Events

There are many other events organised by Gwent Wildlife Trust, SEWBRc and other conservation organisations so do check out their listings as well: [Gwent Wildlife Trust Events Calendar](#), [SEWBRc Events Calendar](#)

Social Media

Monmouthshire Meadows Group is on Facebook and Instagram. [Join the Facebook group](#) to exchange information including organise seed swaps and collection, and for discuss meadow restoration. You must be a member of MMG to join the group.



On Instagram we are [@monmouthshiremeadows](#)

Monmouthshire Meadows Committee

Stephanie Tyler (Honorary President)
Rachel Morgan (Chair)
David Llewellyn (Treasurer)
Marilyn Dunkelman (Membership Secretary)
Pam Manfield (Minutes Secretary)
Dick Coates (Wet Meadow)

Maggie Hamlen (Membership Clerk)
Clare Adamson (Trustee)
Judith Carruthers (Trustee)
Clare Catto (Trustee)
Teona Dorrien-Smith (Trustee)
Stephanie Poulter (Trustee)