

# MEADOWS NEWS

## Conserving and Restoring Wildflower-rich Grasslands in Monmouthshire

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Orchids /Clare Adamson



Lent Lily /Clare Adamson

## Welcome

Welcome to the MMG Spring newsletter! After over 10 years at the helm Marilyn is handing over the editorial reins to Clare Adamson. Marilyn has built up a fabulous resource for members in her biannual newsletters which you can find on the website [here](#). You will still get regular informative emails from Marilyn, who continues in her role as membership secretary; and if you don't yet have a copy of the field guide to Grassland Fungi you can now purchase the 3rd edition which she has just finished editing!

We would all like to say thank you to Rachel Duncan, who has chaired the board of trustees for 5 years. Rachel joined the trustees 10 years ago, initially as treasurer and subsequently as Chair. In that role she led the group through a metamorphosis from charity to CIO – essential for MMG to continue to own land. Rachel is now stepping aside from the Chair, but will continue to bring her experience to the group.

Finally, if you would like to get more involved in the meadows group we are always on the lookout for volunteers to assist with events as well as with field work, and we are looking for some part-time cattle-wranglers at Wet Meadow! See page 5 for details.

*Sally Jones*

The **MMG Committee** is a small one and all of our trustees have skills we particularly value, so it is a sad occasion when we have to say goodbye to members who have made such a valuable contribution to the functioning of the Group.

**Stephanie Poulter** and her husband, Alan, have done so much for the Meadows Group since its formation. They were instrumental in acquiring, and were responsible for the care of, our two Exmoor ponies: Jacinth and Jemima. For eighteen years they transported the ponies around the county to graze different members' fields: checking the suitability of the terrain and the fencing, and always prioritising the ponies' health. It was a mammoth task so thank you both for all the time you devoted to their transport and well-being. Steph may have retired from the committee, but she and Alan have kindly offered to continue organising the all-important raffle at our members' meetings!



Jacinth & Jemima/ Lindsay Tyler

**Pam Manfield** has been a committee member for several years, assiduously taking notes of our meetings as Minutes Secretary. Thank you, Pam, for keeping the committee on track so efficiently.



## Sally Jones Our New Chair

### Well this is a surprise!

I was delighted to join the board of trustees in April last year, and a little surprised to find myself taking on the role of Chair in September. My husband and I have a small organic farm north of Raglan, and

we have been the recipients of expert advice from both Steph Tyler and Sheelagh Kerry.

The realisation of how little I knew about the lovely wildflowers in our meadows inspired me to take a botany course and to learn more about wildflowers through the botany walks led by Steph Tyler and Elsa Wood. On retiring from the NHS I set up a small wildflower nursery, initially just collecting small quantities of seed and growing them on. My peat-free, plastic-free organic nursery opened at the start of the pandemic and caught the imagination of people looking at the natural world in new ways. Five years later I am delighted that there are now many more wildflower nurseries offering sustainably-grown plants.

This is great time to be a part of the meadows group; our new strategy aims to enhance community engagement, support wider landscape connectivity; and ensure that our reserves meet the objectives of the CIO to not only support a diverse flora, but also to ensure the diversity of other species that rely on them.



If you would like to get more involved in the meadows group we are always on the lookout for volunteers to assist with events as well as with field work.

**Volunteer application form**

<https://forms.gle/GSVM9thmaW7C8pJ69>



## This year's AGM will take place in Llanarth Village Hall on Thursday 10 April.

Doors will open at 6pm and the talk starts at 6.30pm. The AGM will be held at 7.30pm.

The talk is free (although donations are appreciated), and is open to non-members.

Supper is available after the AGM with an opportunity to socialise and chat to other meadows enthusiasts.



Members enjoying the MMG Supper!

Everyone is welcome to stay for the supper. It is a two-course meal and is £18 a head, including a glass of wine or soft drink.

**We do need everyone to book please, even if not paying anything, as numbers are limited.** We shall close bookings if the event fills up.

More information, including directions, and the booking form are here: [link to Eventbrite booking page](#). Any questions or problems **get in touch with us**.

## Dung beetles and diversity for animal health

At this year's AGM and Spring meeting, our guest speaker will be Claire Whittle, a vet whose special interest is the positive impact of regenerative agriculture on animal health and welfare.

Claire will be talking about the role of dung beetles and how nature benefits livestock health and welfare.

Dung beetles are valuable little creatures. They are nature's recyclers, removing the excretions left by animals, taking it back into the soil and promoting healthy plant growth while removing parasites and helping to aerate the soil. They are key species in a thriving and diverse grassland ecology. But like many other species in the UK today, they are under threat and their numbers seriously declining.

Claire is best known as the vet lead for **Dung Beetles for Farmers**, an online information hub which highlights the benefits of dung beetles and advises on how farmers and others with livestock on their land can contribute to dung beetle conservation.

Claire's talk will commence at 6.30pm, with time for questions afterwards. The talk will be followed at 7.30pm by a brief AGM and then supper.



A dung beetle in the Forest of Dean by Gareth James, CC BY-SA 2.0 creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0, via Wikimedia Commons Original

## Plant Surveys 2024

During 2024, visits were made by Steph Tyler, Elsa Wood and Wendy Tyler-Batt to more than 20 new MMG members. Each member was provided with a plant list of their land and advice on management to enhance biodiversity.

Some visits were to small garden meadows but others to larger areas of land, some 25 to 50 acres or more. At least five of the sites merited designation as a Local Wildlife Site because of the frequency and presence of a wide range of indicator species, (special species that typify agriculturally unimproved grassland). We have provided plant lists and advice to The Grange near Talycoed (a rewilding project), and also to Llanishen Village Hall and Trellech School. We have strayed into Breconshire and Herefordshire to visit members but all flower-rich grassland, wherever it is, is important.

If any MMG member has not yet had a visit, do please contact us. The survey and advice are free but if you have had one visit already but would like a second one to see how more diverse your grassland has become or for further advice, then a donation to travel costs would be welcomed. Don't forget, never add artificial fertiliser.

Steph Tyler email:  
steph\_tyler2001@hotmail.com



## Fungi New Edition

**Congratulations** to Elsa Wood and Jon Dunkelman for their terrific new edition of ***Grassland Fungi: a field guide***. A work of love and crawling on hands and knees!

Elsa and Jon have been documenting the fungi in grassland in the Lower Wye Valley since 2015.

As the only book specialising in identifying

this particular area of the fungus world, it is an important work and has proved very popular.

This third edition includes some rare Waxcaps (one only recently discovered), some new Pinkgills, and an enlarged section on the enigmatic Earthtongues. It also includes 16 new species, with many more photographs and sections covering conservation issues and the many recent species name changes.

Fungi are easily destroyed by modern agricultural practices – ploughing or fertilising a field will remove the underground mycelium and it can take decades to re-establish. Even today little is understood about the relationship between fungi and environment in which they grow. We know, for example, that some flowers require certain fungi to be present before they will germinate. The more people that learn about grassland fungi, the more chance there is that their habitats will be recognised and protected.



Waxcap/Lucy

The authors, photographers and editorial team (Marilyn Dunkelman) have undertaken this entirely as volunteers, so the proceeds go towards Monmouthshire Meadows Group and their work in helping to conserve and protect the species-rich grasslands in which these fungi thrive.

Buy online direct from our distributor [nhbs.com](https://www.nhbs.com) or order through your local bookshop  
Retail price £24.99 ISBN 978-0-9576424-3-0





Orchid/Dick Coates

**Wet Meadow:** 2ft-high Common Spotted Orchid, June 2024.

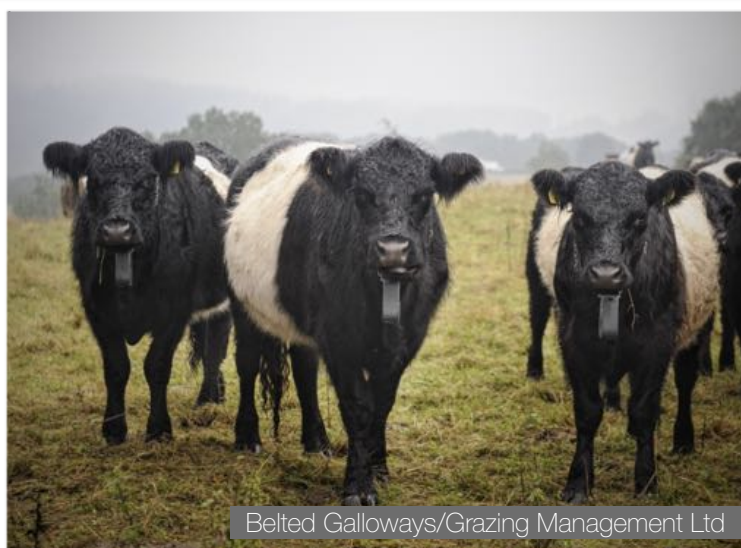
**MMG is very grateful** to Wye Valley National Landscape (previously AONB) for funding this two-year project at Wet Meadow though their Sustainable Development Fund from Welsh Government. They will also be helping sign up volunteers and make sure they have everything they need.

The total project cost is £33,849: SDF amount £24,525, match funding £9,324.



Grazing Management Ltd

## Wet Meadow Cattle



Belted Galloways/Grazing Management Ltd

**Trellech Wet Meadow** will be visited by a herd of approx 10 conservation grazing cattle this summer, to help manage the growth of some of the more dominant plants and allow the wildflowers and the invertebrates that depend on them to flourish. The cattle are managed by conservation grazing specialists Grazing Management Ltd, who also look after the grazing at nearby Cleddon Bog and Beacon Hill, using their native breed Belted Galloway and Ancient Cattle of Wales cattle as a nature restoration service.

The cattle will be onsite from mid-May to September, and will be wearing geo-collars which provide "virtual fencing" via GPS. This means the cattle can be restricted to different parts of the site during their visit, ensuring there are always cattle-free areas for visitors not keen to meet them. For the first two months, the cattle will be in the northern half of the reserve, and move to the southern half in July (signage will be provided). The cattle are friendly, and used to people and dogs, but anyone visiting is advised to keep their dog on a lead or under close control.

We're looking for volunteer livestock checkers to help monitor the daily welfare of the cattle. It would be a commitment of about an hour a week (or less - one check) and full training is provided. So if you live near Trellech and are interested in finding out more, please contact MMG or [steph\\_tyler2001@hotmail.com](mailto:steph_tyler2001@hotmail.com).

There will be some disruption during March as contractors are putting in a cattle holding pen near the entrance gate off the Trellech road (not the Roman Way entrance).







## MMG Donation

Continuing our close collaboration with the Gwent Wildlife Trust, MMG was happy to make a donation of £1000 to sponsor the Trust's **Ten Vulnerable Species Recovery** project.



Pink Waxcap/Jon Dunkelman

Our donation will go specifically to support the habitats of the Pink Waxcap. The ten species concerned are: Adder, Barn Owl, Dipper, Grayling, Hedgehog, Nightjar, Pine Marten, Pink Waxcap, Shril Carder Bee and Water Vole. The Trust is keen for people to become species recorders by entering their sightings of these key species through their website, link below.  
[www.gwentwildlife.org](http://www.gwentwildlife.org)

Knapweed/Clare Adamson



## MMG Open Meadows 2025

Open Meadows June 2024



Copyright David Broadbent Photography

**MMG Open Meadows** is on Sunday 22 June. This year we will be welcomed at Boxbush, Capel-y-fin, and also Sheelagh Kerry's meadows located between Bettws and Forest Coal Pit.

We will give further details of the day and directions to this area of the Black Mountains nearer the time.

Open Meadows June 2024



Copyright David Broadbent Photography

## Summer Courses

- ♦ **Steph Tyler** will run a plant ID course at MMGs Kingcoed meadows. This is an opportunity to identify orchids and many other meadows plants.
- ♦ **A scything course** is planned with scything expert Andrea Gilpin at Ty Mawr.

Both courses are always popular - watch out for more details by email.

## Flower Facts

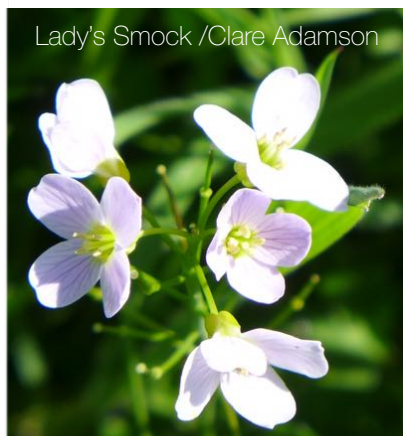
### *Cardamine pratensis*

Also known as the cuckooflower and lady's smock, this lovely plant raises its pretty pink flowers above the grass before it starts to grow too strongly in early spring. It's a member of the crucifer family, so the flowers have pale pink 4 petals arranged in a cross. It has a basal rosette of complex leaves with rounded or kidney-shaped leaflets, while the upper leaves have very fine leaflets.

Lady's smock is the favoured food plant of the Orange-tip butterfly (*Anthocharis cardamines*), which is widespread across the UK. It is also used by the larvae of the Green-veined White (*Pieris napi*), and is associated with ten species of beetle, as well as other invertebrates such as flies, mites, and moths.

Lady's smock is found throughout the UK, and prefers damp meadows, streamsides, and damp woodlands.

Sally Jones



## Ray Armstrong

Ray was a lovely caring man – a real gentleman. He had had a deep interest in wildlife since he was a child. I first met him more than 40 years ago when he and Beccy lived at Catbrook. It was through our shared interest in birds that we met. Ray wanted to learn how to ring birds so for several years we had some great trips out to ring Pied Flycatcher and other nestlings in boxes, Merlin and Ring Ousels in the Black Mountains and Dippers on the local streams. Ray had excellent fieldcraft and could find nests even of difficult species such as Nightjars.

He soon moved with Beccy to their lovely home on Beacon Hill where in retirement he further developed his exceptional skills as a wildlife photographer. He was passionate about all living things, whether plants, snakes, butterflies and moths or birds and he cared deeply about the many threats facing them and their decline in his local patch around the Trellech Plateau and Wye Valley. His wonderful book *Time to Share – Wildlife in a corner of Britain* published in 2005 depicts some of his excellent photographs and the text clearly shows his great knowledge of, and love of, his subjects.

When the Monmouthshire Meadows Group was founded in 2001 to help safeguard remnants of species-rich grassland and to encourage landowners to manage and restore their grasslands for plants and insects, Ray and Beccy were early members. They have supported the group in many ways over the years – attending meetings, donating to help buy land as nature reserves and Ray producing beautiful cards with his photos for the Group to sell to raise funds.

When Ray and Beccy moved again, this time to Penallt, his lawn and bank there proved to be very rich in plants with orchids and many other species. They all provided subjects for his photography. The plants all flourished with Ray's regime of allowing the lawn and bank to grow unmown between April and August and then with the help of the Meadows Group cutting it, raking it off and where possible taking the green hay to restore other sites.

Sadly, ill health slowed him down in recent years and it is my real regret that I never saw him once he moved away from Penallt to Llanellen. We will miss you Ray and we will do our very best to try to safeguard what you loved so much.

Stephanie Tyler



## Dates for your diary

23 March

**GWT Landowner Event**

27 March

**Parish Grasslands Project AGM**

10 April

**MMG Supper and AGM**

8 June

**Open Farm Sunday**

22 June

**MMG Open Meadows Day**

1-31 May

**No Mow May**

20 May

**World Bee Day**

7 June

**Plant ID at Kingcoed**

June-August

**Big Meadow Search**

18 July - 10 August

**Big Butterfly Count**

13 September

**Usk Show**

## Pollination

If you didn't catch the recent *In Our Time* programme on pollination, it's well worth a listen. It's a fascinating insight into the surprising array of tricks employed by plants to attract pollinators and the sophisticated methods insects have evolved to seek out and exploit this food source.

**In Our Time** - bbc sounds



Bees /Clare Adamson

## GWT Local Wildlife Sites Landowner Event

Gwent Wildlife Trust's annual event for landowners with designated Local Wildlife Sites, is on Sunday 23 March, 10am-1pm, in Usk.

Any member of MMG is invited to attend whether you have a LWS or not. It's a morning of talks and discussion and another chance to chat to like-minded landowners.

There will be four talks:

Andy Karran, GWT, will talk about Nightjars including their ecology and folklore, and the 2025 Nightjar census.

Kath Beasley, GWT, will explain how you can be involved in citizen science projects that help you to understand more about the ecology of your land.

Jen Robertson, Avon Wildlife Trust, will present Talking to Farmers and Landowners about Climate Change.

Ciaran Clark, Bees for Development, will talk about solitary bees and introduce the Bees of Monmouthshire Recording Project.

Please [book your place through the GWT web site](#) and you will receive details of the location from them.

## Parish Grasslands Project

The AGM of PGP will be held on 27 March, at 7.30pm, at the Mackenzie Hall, Brockweir. The main event will be a talk by Chantal Lyons about wild boar, based on her book *Groundbreakers*. Since it was published early last year it has won two leading conservation and ecology literary awards.

## Contact MMG

- ♦ The MMG Newsletter is semi-annual, with Spring and Autumn editions. We welcome contributions and photos from our members. Email the editor: [news.monmeadows@gmail.com](mailto:news.monmeadows@gmail.com)
- ♦ If you are new to MMG and would like to become a member, you will find details on how to join on our website: [monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk](http://monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk)
- ♦ Follow us on social media: Facebook and Instagram





