

Our aims are to conserve and enhance the landscape by enabling members to maintain, manage and restore their semi-natural grasslands and associated features



Photo: Ann Robinson

Trevor Evans receives an MBE

The MMG Committee is delighted that our President, Trevor Evans, was mentioned in the New Year Honours list. He received a well-deserved M.B.E. for services to wildlife conservation. For 40 years Trevor has been Monmouthshire vice-county recorder (vice-county 35 is similar to the old county of Gwent with a few minor differences) for the Botanical Society of the British Isles and in his early 80's he wrote the much acclaimed Flora of Monmouthshire. That book is a 'must' for anyone interested in plants in their local patch. His knowledge of the county and its plants is second to none, having lived most of his life in Chepstow where he taught for many years at the secondary school.

Congratulations Trevor!

From the Chair

The grant from Environment Wales for travel costs involved in survey work and for a bilingual report of our surveys on members' land has kept us busy. During the late summer Glynis Laws, Maggie Biss, Sheelagh Kerry and I carried out surveys and entered all these as well as more historical data dating back as far as 2003 onto a database. Analysis of these data formed the basis for the Environment Wales report, a copy of which now on the website. Highlights of the surveys are coming across 'new' species-rich meadows and pastures. Seven sites surveyed this year met the criteria for Local Wildlife Site designation. Owners of Local Wildlife Sites are eligible for funding under the Natural Assets project and some of our members with such sites were successful in their applications for up to £2000 for fencing or hedge-laying.

Unfortunately details of work tasks that we had organised this autumn/winter that were emailed to members disappeared into the ether so tasks were not well-attended. Clearance of brambles, scrub and/or long grass has continued using our CCW-funded Trakmaster machine at members' fields at Penallt, Trellech, Whitebrook, Botany Bay, Abergavenny and Craig y Dorth. If you need brambles mown please let us know although work should only be carried out later in the season as many birds are already nesting.

Through PONT, Welsh Mountain Ponies were found to graze three members' sites in the autumn/winter of 2011/12 as our own Exmoor Ponies whilst continuing to work for conservation grazing, cannot be everywhere. The Exmoor Ponies in 2011/12 grazed pastures on Far Hill, Trellech, at two sites in the Whitebrook Valley, in The Narth, at Llanvapley and elsewhere. As usual Alan and Steph Poulter used their own horse-box to transport the ponies wherever they were needed so many thanks to them. It can take surprisingly long to catch one of the ponies up as she has become an escape artist.

In January of this year Maggie Biss and I attended the inaugural meeting of the new Dean Meadows Group which was attended by about 130 interested people. As well as encouraging the fledgling Dean Group, we have given several talks and attended many other meetings - in Cwmbran aimed at the restoration of hay meadows at Llanyrafon, in Usk at Monmouthshire County Council's Biodiversity Partnership meetings, at Dingestow with GWT, CCW and MCC over designation of further Local Wildlife Sites (Local Wildlife Sites Panel) and over grant applications through the Natural Assets Project.

We are very grateful to Marilyn Dunkelman who offered to take on the website from Jerry Kavanagh during the year. She has spent a lot of time revamping it and updating it.

We have I hope organised an interesting series of meetings during the spring and summer when you will have the opportunity to visit other members' fields, take part in plant identification courses and count Green-veined Orchids. If you need your fields to be grazed by the ponies or if you need brambles and scrub mown, please let us know. *A donation towards costs is welcomed!*

SOME IMPORTANT DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

In 2012 rather than have four or five sites 'open' on the same day we have organised a number of 'open days' through June and July so that we will not be rained off on them all! There will also be some informal flower identification refresher courses in May. On Open Days visits can be made between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. unless noted otherwise

Sunday May 6th Meet at New Grove Farm at 10.30 a.m. to see and count **Green-veined Orchids** at New Grove Farm and adjacent Gwent Wildlife Trust meadows and other private land nearby. There will be some botanical training too. New Grove Farm (the home of membership secretary Pam Lloyd) lies on the Monmouth to Trellech road. From Monmouth continue past the turn to Penallt and Whitebrook; look out for the single wind turbine on your right and soon turn right into New Grove Farm, about half a mile from Trellech.

Wednesday May 23rd and Saturday May 26th Training mornings in plant identification; meeting at Pentwyn Farm, Penallt at 10.30 a.m. If you want to come along please let Steph Tyler know - steph_tyler2001@hotmail.com or 01600 719890.

Sunday June 3rd Open day at Richard Cornock's smallholding near Portskewett (29 Leechpool Holdings, NP26 5UA) for meadow flowers. Park outside the Cornock's house. (For further information see website at www.leechpoolwildlife.co.uk)

Sunday June 10th Open day at Chris Parsons' wonderful meadows and orchard near Little Dean in the Forest of Dean. This site is well worth seeing although outside MMG's patch. It has a wide range of species including a scarce strangely-named umbellifer Corky-fruited Water Dropwort *Oenanthe pimpinelloides* and there are superb views down to the Severn valley. If you are interested please contact MMG so that we can arrange car-share opportunities.

Sunday June 17th Open Day at Parson's Grove (Joni Gooch) near Earlswood. This is a good chance to see this rich area of woodland and five species-rich pastures by the Cas Troggy Brook. From Shirenewton village drive north past the village hall on the left and continue to the first turn to the left. Continue along this narrow road, following the signs to Parsons Grove. Parking will also be available at Oxpool Cottage just before Parsons Grove.

Saturday June 23rd Biodiversity blitz at Tymawr Convent, Lydart between Trellech and Monmouth in association with GWT and SEWBReC. Details will be on the MMG website but it is likely to run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. There will be it is hoped be experts available on plants, moths, butterflies, mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

Sunday July 1st Bettws, near Fforest Coal Pit, Abergavenny (Peter Smith & Sheelagh Kerry). This will be an opportunity to see an upland smallholding with woodland and pastures about which Sheelagh talked at the last MMG Autumn meeting. We hope to have a biodiversity blitz, preparing an inventory of all species present (plants, butterflies, birds etc) so all welcome.

Sunday July 15th Another chance to visit Leechpool Holdings, Portskewett (NP26 5UA) to see arable flowers such as Corn Marigold and Cornflower growing among the sacrificial crops.

Threatened Species in Monmouthshire

Stephanie Tyler

*Each year for the last five years the Botanical Society has selected 10 threatened species on which to focus survey efforts. In some years none of the species in the list occur in Monmouthshire but in 2012 there are three species in the list in our patch. One is an inconspicuous yellow-flowered umbellifer Slender Hare's Ear *Bupleurum tenuissimum* (related to Cow Parsley) that only occurs along the coast in Monmouthshire, favouring the seawall and upper saltmarsh. A second is an inconspicuous small annual plant that grows on mud at the edges of ponds as these dry out in the summer – Least Water-pepper *Persicaria minor*. The third is the scarce and beautiful Green-veined (Green-winged) Orchid *Anacamptis morio* (formerly *Orchis morio*) that grows on agriculturally unimproved, species-rich grassland.*



Early Purple Orchid



Spotlight on Green-veined Orchids

Green-veined Orchids are still found in a few meadows in Monmouthshire. The best sites for sheer numbers of flowers are the Gwent Wildlife Trust's fields at Pentwyn Farm, Penallt and at New Grove near Trellech but at least seven MMG members have these lovely orchids in their fields. These members own sites in Penallt, Penyvan, Cwmcarnvan near Trellech, Star Hill near Devauden and between Shirenewton and Earlswood. Other known non MMG sites are Far Hill at Devauden, Kilgwrrg near Devauden, the limestone grasslands on the Ministry of Defence land at Caerwent and GWT's Brockwells Farm near Caerwent. In all we know of the orchid's presence at just 25 sites although it used to occur at several more but has not been seen at these in recent years. Some former sites as at Penallt and the Narth have been built on but orchids may persist on some lawns if these are left unmown in the spring. This note is a plea to all MMG members to look out for Green-veined Orchids this April on their land or indeed anywhere. There are only two early flowering orchids – Green-veined and Early Purple Orchids and they are easily told apart. Early Purple Orchids have black blotches on their leaves and a long flower spike with numerous flowers, each

flower having a long spur; Green-veined Orchids have plain leaves, the flower spikes are shorter, with fewer flowers than Early Purple Orchids and each flower has a hood with dark green lines – hence the name Green-veined.

If you see Green-veined Orchids anywhere – even on a lawn - do please contact me as soon as you can either through the website or directly .Steph Tyler email: steph_tyler2001@hotmail.com

Autumn Meeting 2011

Glynis Laws

Nearly 80 people came to our autumn meeting at Monmouth Priory last October. Gemma Bodé talked about Living Landscapes, describing Gwent Wildlife Trust's approach to connecting sites of importance to wildlife. Gemma gave a similar talk to GWT's Landowners' meeting last spring that was reported in our last Newsletter. Although some MMG members were at that meeting, we thought that Living Landscapes was of such relevance and interest to all our members that we invited Gemma to address our autumn meeting. Establishing connections between wildlife sites is important for preserving biodiversity and is central to the aims set out in Living Landscapes. In the context of wildflower meadows, identifying and maintaining existing meadows are important but establishing connections between them by creating new meadows and caring for wild flowers on verges and other public spaces by appropriate management may increase their value for biodiversity. Four members gave short talks about their meadows. Andy Pullen described the work that he has been doing at Angidy in the Wye Valley. At the other side of the county, Sheelagh Kerry, an ecologist and MMG committee member, described the small-holding that she and her family care for with wildlife in mind at Fforest Pit. If you enjoyed Sheelagh's talk, there will be an opportunity to visit this summer as Sheelagh will be hosting one of our Open Days. Alison Broughton, also a committee member, talked about some of the problems encountered in running the community meadows established by Shirenewton and Mynyddbach Fields Association (SAMFAL). Finally, Chris Parsons talked a bit about his meadows and orchards in East Dean and then described how he and other interested people in the area were hoping to start up their own meadows group along the lines of MMG. Chris will also be holding an Open Day this summer.

As usual, the talks were followed by supper and the opportunity to meet and chat with other members.

Shrill Carder Bee

Sinead Lynch

Spring is a wonderful time to see queen bumblebees buzzing lazily around hedgerows and grassy margins, scoping out the perfect place to set up home and start building their nest. But while these industrious and hardy creatures are wide awake, some of their fellow bumblebees are still fast asleep underground up until late April / early May. The shrill carder bee (*Bombus sylvarum*) is one such 'late' species. But despite its tardiness in waking up, it is still going strong late into the bumblebee nesting season, even after some of our other bumblebee species have actually started hibernating!

But the shrill carder bee has not fared well over the past 50 years, and one of the problems for them is that there is not enough nectar and pollen sources available for them come August and September, this is partly because there are very few areas in the wider countryside which are left uncut. Many wildflower meadows are cut in mid-July to August, and nowadays much of the wider countryside is mown or heavily grazed, leaving very few flowers for our 'late' bumblebees.

But landowners in Monmouthshire can help the shrill carder bee. Simple measures such as cutting your meadow(s) late every few years on rotation (or by rotationally leaving a different strip or patch uncut every year), or by enhancing the species richness of your meadow by addition of local wildflower seed, will help to provide a more diverse and more prolonged source of nectar and pollen. Gwent Wildlife Trust, in partnership with Monmouthshire Meadows Group and Bumblebee Conservation Trust, are working with landowners in Gwent to help manage land to benefit the shrill carder bee in the hope that we can help secure a future for this rare and threatened species - please get in touch if you would like to get involved. (GWT contact details?)

The shrill carder bee is a rare species which is only known to have 6 key population areas in the UK, 3 of which are in Wales. (Picture) For more information please contact Sinead Lynch, BfE Conservation Officer (Wales) for the **Bumblebee Conservation Trust** on sinead.lynch@bumblebeeconservation.org or 01656 332960.



Shrill Carder Bee

Photo Bumble Bee Conservation Trust

Visit to see Oxford Floodplain Meadows

Maggie Biss and Stephanie Tyler had a day out in November when they went to Oxford to meet Alison McDonald who has been doing research on Oxford Mead floodplain meadows at Wytham near Oxford since 1986. Alison has some experimental plots on the Somerford Mead meadows where the grass and flowers are cut for hay after mid June. In the autumn, on three plots there is aftermath grazing by sheep; on another three plots there is aftermath grazing by cattle and on the third set of three plots no grazing after the hay is cut. She is comparing what effect the different managements have on the meadow's flora.

Interestingly and significantly, she has found that floristic diversity and diversity of some invertebrates is lowest on the ungrazed plots where tussocky grasses quickly become dominant and where many broad leaved species disappear and highest on the cattle-grazed plots.

You can watch an interesting 'virtual walk' through the meadows by going to the site on this link

<http://www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk/content/virtual-walk>

Gwent Wildlife Trust's latest project, to support some of our best places for wildlife (known as 'Local Wildlife Sites'), has attracted much interest since its inception in the summer.

The Monmouthshire Natural Assets Project is a collaboration with Monmouthshire County Council, and is working to restore, maintain and add value to the county's Local Wildlife Sites. The project is able to offer wildlife and management advice to Local Wildlife Site (LWS) owners and managers and there is a small grants scheme, with grants of up to £2,000 to help with capital works projects that support the restoration and enhancement of Local Wildlife Sites. **Awarded Grants**

The first grant panel meeting awarded a total of almost £8,000 to six Local Wildlife Sites, with a further £10,000 provisionally awarded to a further seven sites at the last panel meeting. The grant money will significantly contribute to the conservation and enhancement of these high value nature sites. A number of the projects have been for fencing to enable wildflower-rich grassland to be sensitively grazed.

Amongst the successful 1st batch of grant applicants are a number MMG Local Wildlife Site owners. These include Barbara Newby who received a grant to lay 120m of hedgerow along the edge of **Stevenstone Meadow Local Wildlife Site (Lydart)** and Sarah Cheese who received a grant to help fence **Kinson's Farm Local Wildlife Site (Whitebrook)**. Scrub had gradually taken over the species-rich field until Sarah Cheese and Tom Cousins bought it in 2009 and set themselves the task of restoring it, spending numerous days clearing the brambles and scrub over the last 2 years. The fencing will enable the site to be grazed by MMG's ponies and help the remnant grassland patch expand and once again flourish.

Local Wildlife Site Surveys

With the help of a seasonal surveyor, we'll also be identifying new Local Wildlife Sites. To date GWT and Monmouthshire Meadows Group survey efforts have focused on the identification of species-rich grassland Local Wildlife Sites, but we'll also be looking to assess other habitat types over the next 2 years. If you have land which you think may be of Local Wildlife Site quality and would like a survey or habitat management advice please do contact us.

The project is one of a suite of projects supported under Axis 3 of the Monmouthshire Rural Development Plan, funded by the Welsh Assembly Government and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. We're also grateful to the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) who also provide funding for the project.

For more information see www.gwentwildlife.org/mon_nat_assets or contact Rebecca Price rprice@gwentwildlife.org

Hedgerow laid with Natural Assets Grant, Stevenstone Meadow Local Wildlife Site
Photo R Price



Focus on member Glynis Laws

Far Barn at St Maughans

Back in ca 2006 a visit by Rebecca Price of the Gwent Wildlife Trust changed the fortunes for plants at Far Barn, owned by Graeme and Glynis Laws. When the Laws moved into the converted barn, they followed the previous owners and mowed weekly the field below the house through which the drive up to the house runs from the St Maughans to Skenfrith road. Becca suggested that it would save a lot of effort if they left the field unmown and it might benefit plants.

Graeme took this advice and there has been 'no looking back'. The Meadows Group visited the site in May 2007, again in summer 2008 and annually since and found that the resulting hay meadow even back in 2007 was already species-rich with many species of grass and typical flowers such as Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Cowslip *Primula veris* and Birds-foot Trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*. Damp areas support Ladies Smock *Cardamine pratensis*, Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi*, Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Wild Angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica* and Water Figwort *Scrophularia auriculata*. One uncommon plant which thrives here is Pepper Saxifrage *Silaum silaus*, a yellow-flowered umbellifer. A small ditch through the meadow has wetland species including rushes and sedges and in October 2011 a clump of Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis* appeared. Sneezewort Yarrow *Achillea ptarmica* appeared here too in 2010 and other species new to the site continue to appear, such as Centaury *Centaureum erythraea* and Tufted Vetch *Vicia cracca*. In summer the meadow is alive with the sound of insects and supports numerous moth and butterfly species. Increased numbers of birds have been observed with house martins nesting for the first time in 2010, and flocks of goldfinches enjoy the knapweed seeds before the hay is cut.

The meadow looks attractive with mown paths so that you can walk through it and enjoy the plants and butterflies. The sad thing is that Becca hasn't seen it since her visit to a lawn in 2006. About 80 species of plant have now been recorded. Everyone even if they have only a small area of mown lawn could stop regular mowing on part of it from the spring to mid July and see what appears.

In early February 2012 a panel that looks at sites meeting the criteria for Local Wildlife Sites approved the Far Barn meadow as one such site.



Yarrow and busy beetles!

Photo G Laws

Bumblebee Training Day

Magor Marsh Nature Reserve
Thursday 17th May 2012
10am—3pm

GWT are lucky enough to welcome Sinead Lynch, BFF Conservation Officer Wales, to give training and information on the following:

- ◆ Bumblebee Ecology
- ◆ Bumblebee Conservation
- ◆ The Shril Carder Bee
- ◆ Bumblebee ID
- ◆ Bee Walk Methodology

Following the training, in conjunction with the Trusts Shril Carder Bee Project, we will be coordinating Bumblebee walks and habitat surveys of land on the Gwent Levels and surrounding areas. GWT is looking for a small team of volunteers who would be willing to commit to helping undertake the monthly surveying for the season (April—September).

This course is free but spaces are very limited, please contact **Nicola Stone—nstone@gwentwildlife.org** to book a space. Tea and coffee will be provided but please bring your own lunch.

Partnership: Shril Carder Bee—Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Gwent Wildlife Trust, Gwent Wildlife Trust

And finally...A warning!

Wild daffodils are at risk from hybridization with garden bulbs.

On the other side of the Wye, over the last few years many hundreds of garden varieties have been dug out on Shaw Common, Newent, but still they proliferate. Local people have arranged a work party on the morning of 10th May to remove more. All are welcome to join in meet at 9.30am by the new interpretation board at Shaw Common.



Shaw Common Invasion

Membership is the life blood of the Group and our new online membership form makes joining and renewing easy .If you are not a member and would like to join, please contact Pam LLOYD on 01600 860924 or lloyds08@tiscali.co.uk or Jill Featherstone on jillyfeather@yahoo.com For general information please contact Maggie Biss on 01989750740 or monmouthmeadows@aol.co.uk

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 -

***Tom Ward-Jackson of Tidy Towns** has been very helpful to MMG in obtaining funding for our insurance costs. **The Countryside Council of Wales (CCW)** has been immensely supportive and we are particularly grateful to **Rob Bacon** and also to **Miki Miyata-Lee** for all their help with our applications for funding.*

*We are most grateful to **Environment Wales** for helping fund surveys of members' fields in 2011/2012 and also to **Alison Colebrook of Wildlife Trusts of Wales** for her guidance over Environment Wales funding procedures. **Charles Morgan of PONT - the Welsh Grazing Project** - has provided useful advice to MMG on local graziers.*

