Issue 42 - Autumn 2026

MEADOWS NEWS

Conserving and Restoring Wildflower-rich Grasslands in Monmouthshire

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Teasel leaf /C Adamson



Knapweed seed head/C Adamson

Welcome

Welcome to the MMG Autumn Newsletter!

As the cooler temperatures and rainy days of autumn set in, memories of the summer are gradually fading. Yet weather wise it was an unprecedented year for records being broken. According to the Met Office, 2026 was provisionally the warmest summer on record: heatwaves, wildfires, drought.

With a succession of hot summers the impact on our meadows may become apparent in time. According to Cambridge University: '*in the long term we are likely to see smaller populations of wild flowering plants and smaller populations of insect pollinators, with the pollinators also facing challenges in finding nest sites in baked ground – local extinctions are possible*.'

The results of the Big Butterfly Count indicate that heatwave conditions were a boon for butterflies but the outlook for caterpillars is not so sunny: '*a good summer for adult butterflies is not the same as a good summer for butterfly populations.'*

But read on to find out how MMG members are assisting nature by creating a meadows cluster and wildlife gardens…

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From our Chair



This year we bade farewell to two very longstanding trustees who have retired from the MMG committee: Marilyn Dunkelman, Membership Secretary and all-round MMG organiser, and David Llewellyn, Treasurer. Our newest Trustee, Christopher Guinness, has taken over seamlessly from David and has been very supportive of the committee. Marilyn was central to the running of the organisation for over a decade, and just how much she did during this time has become apparent to us all! Her role as Membership Secretary has been taken on by our new Trustee, Siân Jones. Siân has implemented a new membership system which has helped to streamline the enrolment process, and you will all be receiving your membership reminders or requests to sign up for Gift Aid from her.

By signing up for Gift Aid you can increase the value of your contributions to the Meadows group by 25%, at no cost to you, so if you haven't already done so please head to the Membership page on our new website or scan the QR code below to complete the Gift Aid form.

For technical reasons we were obliged to move our website to a new host, Krystal, which provides an excellent low-cost service for charities. Unfortunately the process of transferring the website over was more complex than anticipated! We are grateful to have been supported by Huw Jones and Hamish Blair, both providing much-needed expertise at low cost. Huw has developed the website, and Hamish the social media and marketing. I hope that you have all enjoyed the new blog pages and are following our Instagram posts on @monmouthshiremeadows.

Marilyn also ran all of our events, including indoor meetings, open meadows and taking a pop-up stall to a variety of community events across the county. We have been offered some support with events from Wye Valley National Landscape, but we are still looking for a new events coordinator. If you would be interested in joining us as a trustee or would like to help out, please contact me by email to monmeadowsgroupchair@gmail.com.

As autumn approaches we are once again focusing on the management of our reserves. The new Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) provides us with both challenges and opportunities. We are delighted to welcome Pip Morrison as our new volunteer Reserves Manager. Pip owns a beautiful area of traditional hay meadow near Crosshands, with a remarkable level of floral diversity thanks to decades of sympathetic management. He has visited all three reserves with Steph, and will be helping to ensure that our reserves meet both our objectives and those of the SFS.

Sally Jones

Scan the QR code below to complete the Gift Aid form.

MMG Spring Meeting and AGM

Our AGM this year was very popular, with 82 members and guests attending.

Our Chair, Sally Jones, presented a review of the year and financial accounts; our President Steph Tyler gave a short presentation bidding farewell to our membership secretary Marilyn Dunkelman. Siân Jones was approved as a new trustee, and the committee was re-appointed for a further year.

Speakers including Kate Stinchcombe, Richard Thomas and Elliot Waters gave members an introduction to plans to develop Resilient Ecological Networks (RENs) across Gwent. Much like the clusters we are keen to develop among our members, RENs provide space for nature recovery at a landscape scale. The team is doing initial mapping work to identify areas of high quality habitat (core zones), and nearby areas where, with a little help, the habitat could improve — identified as nature recovery zones. Monmouthshire Meadows Group has been supporting the development of the RENs and we look forward to being a part of landscape-scale nature recovery across Gwent.

The meeting was followed, as always, by a delicious homemade meal, with all options catered for, thanks to trustee Clare Adamson and caterer Henny Collins, as well as all the members who contributed delicious cakes and desserts.

Garden Meadows for Biodiversity: MMG Autumn Meeting 2026


Laura Moss - Big Meadow Search

The well-attended autumn meeting on Sunday 25 October was treated to four excellent presentations and discussion about the important contribution gardens can make to nature and broader biodiversity in the UK. With gardens making up 959,800 hectares – over three times the size of the UK's National Nature Reserves – how we manage our gardens, and what we can encourage into them, really matters.

We heard from Dr Steph Tyler, MBE, on biodiversity benefits of garden meadows; Anne Wareham and Charles Hawes – Creating a garden meadow at Veddw House Garden, Devauden; Laura Moss (Carmarthenshire Meadows Group) – What the Big Meadow Search tells us about garden meadows; and, Dr Sally Jones – Resources for a wilder garden. The knowledge they shared will help strengthen our survey and identification skills. They also brought home the importance of plant-wildlife association, inspiring us to reflect on how we manage our small or large areas of garden meadow to benefit the wider ecological value of plants, invertebrates and fungi in relation to the species associated or dependent on them.

A big thank you to them all, and the interesting stalls they provided, for an informative and thought-provoking afternoon. A huge thank you also to Clare Adamson and other volunteers for the delicious cakes and tea, providing time to chat with fellow members and share experience.

Paula Chalinder

Provenance is important for successful wildflower establishment. If you are not able to source local wildflower seed from the MMG, here are some useful links mentioned in the talks:

Celtic wildflowers | Big Meadow Search | ObsIdentify app | The Wildflower Nursery
Eco Hab wildflowers | Seek by iNaturalist app | Emorsgate wildseed.co.uk | see also: MMG Useful Links page

Open Day June 2026

You will all remember the summer of 2026 as endless hot sunny days but unfortunately, the date for our Open Day – 6 June – fell on one of the very few wet days. Very Wet it was too in the morning.

Tim Oliver and I were on duty at Prospect House, Newchurch, in the morning and we led walks around the wonderful meadows together with the owner, Gillian Knowland. Whilst the awful weather deterred many visitors, the hardy souls who did turn up had a real treat. The meadows when Gillian and her husband bought them had been sheep-grazed much of the year; as soon as the regime was turned to a late summer hay cut and then winter grazing by sheep, it was evident that the grassland was species-rich.



Prospect House meadows/Jon Dunkelman

I surveyed the meadows in 2012 and again in 2021 and the increase in diversity was amazing with the sympathetic management. Common Spotted, Heath Spotted and Southern Marsh orchids had all appeared and on the day of the Open Day we were treated to a spectacular density with 100s if not 1000s of Marsh orchids as well as Spotted and their hybrids plus an array of other interesting species.

At Oxpool House at Earlswood, Andy Karran and Lauri Watkins led morning walks at two fields that Chris and Joni Gooch had purchased two years ago. These had also been sheep-grazed; with a change in management, allowing the meadows to grow for hay, the diversity of plants was evident. Alongside the woodland there were also woodland edge species to boost the species count.

In the afternoon we swapped sites with Tim and I going to Earlswood and Andy and Lawri to Newchurch. The weather was kinder and we even had a few brave butterflies flying in the fields at Oxpool House. Although no orchids were seen I, perhaps stupidly, predicted that some would appear within three or four years!

The Open Day could not have happened without the help of many MMG members. The arrangements were made beforehand by Jon and Marilyn Dunkelman and they were present at Newchurch throughout the day, erecting a gazebo, directing parking and welcoming visitors. Thanks are due to other people too who helped out at Newchurch: Ruth and Richard Pugh, James Collett and Simon Taylor; and at Oxpool House: Teona Dorien-Smith, Christopher Guinness and Guin Vaughan; also to Tim, Andy and Lowri for your patience and expertise. Finally, a huge thank you to our hosts Gillian Knowland at Newchurch and Chris and Joni at Oxpool. Chris and Joni also laid on very welcome tea and cakes for which many thanks too.



Orchids Prospect House/ Jon Dunkelman

I hope the fields were not too badly trampled by all the visitors.

Steph Tyler

Wet Meadow


Resting Ramblers - Wet Meadow pew

Since May, 10 Galloway cattle have been grazing at Wet Meadow, joined by a further eight in late August. Volunteers check them daily and ensure their collars are still on. These control where they can go. Grazing rather than hay-making has allowed many plants to continue flowering after July. Dick Coates' watering point at the stream in the south of the reserve has worked well and even in the drought continued flowing. The cattle don't have access to the nearby pond so vegetation and water life there is not adversely affected. Sadly, we may not be able to continue with Grazing Management because of costs. The former AONB, now Wye Valley National Landscapes (WVNL) has funded the project in 2025 and again this year.

Dick, our local warden has kept a good eye on things and has been tackling invasive docks and 101 other tasks. He arranged for the bracken along the edges of fields to be cut, baled and removed in July. Dick also arranged for the digging out again of the old pond in the north-west of the reserve which had dried out in 2025 and again this year. On 17 September a digger removed much of the accumulated silt and deepened the pond considerably. The cost of the pond restoration was kindly met by Monmouthshire County Council through their Nature Recovery fund.


Pond in September before digging


Pond after digging

Wet Meadow *continued*

Highlights have been the spread of Green-winged Orchids from two first found by Jon Dunkelman in 2019 to about 50 flowering spikes this year in two fields, as well as increasing numbers of Dyer's Greenweed plants by the western bog and of Burnet Saxifrage in Brewery Paddock alongside the Trellech to Monmouth Road where a healthy patch of Harebells also survives. Few flowers were present in August other than Water Mint and Devil's-bit Scabious and every flower seemed to have a Small Copper butterfly nectaring on it – we counted about 50 in all. Clouded Yellows, immigrant butterflies from Europe, have also put on a good show whilst many damsel and dragonflies have frequented the new pond in the south.

We have had many human visitors to the reserve too. Monmouth Rambling and Hill walking club came to the reserve on 12 June and I gave a talk about the reserve and its flowers, with members of the group enjoying a rest on the pew seats. WVNL staff visited the reserve on a day out from the office and members of the Monmouthshire Biodiversity Partnership (all the various environmental NGOs co-ordinated by staff at Monmouthshire CC) had their summer evening meeting on 5 August at the reserve with business conducted on and by the pew seats and members having a chance to see the reserve.



Identifying burnet saxifrage / Wendy Tyler Batt

On 10 August Wendy Tyler-Batt and I gave some preliminary training on plant identification to staff of the WVNL and then on 25 September the Joint Advisory Group for the WVNL visited the reserve and heard about the work being done with funding from the WVNL.

The Gwent Fungus Group had a fungus foray at the reserve on 19 September, led by Jon Dunkelman.

Kingcoed

Our local warden, Annie Gorton-Harding has been keeping an eye on the reserve. The fields were cut for hay as usual but this year by Sarah Dusgate, a farmer from near Dingestow who practices regenerative agriculture. She used the bales to spread on a field that she is trying to restore to species-richness. Sheep will graze the reserve over winter. Our fields at Kingcoed have become very species-rich over the years and after the hay had been cut, there was a flush of growth after the late summer rains with many plants flowering again. Prominent among these were swathes of Eyebright in flower as found by Pip Morrison when he visited the reserve in early September. Pip, who has two wonderful fields at Crosshands near Llansoy, is now part of our Reserves Management Committee which includes Teona Dorien-Smith and Andy Karran from GWT.


Eyebright /C Adamson


Greater Butterfly Orchid/CA

Ida's meadow at Maryland

This small reserve gives us few problems. Hay was cut in July when our neighbour's fields were also cut. Pip and I did a count of Greater Butterfly Orchids but this was very disappointing as we only could find about 26 flowers, so different from the hundreds 20 years ago. Perhaps it is just the year as orchids notoriously vary in numbers year on year or possibly the flowers are being eaten by the deer that often frequent the fields.

We would like to welcome Steve and Jane Guillard from The Narth who have kindly offered to warden the reserve. Our wardens visit a reserve every few weeks and report back to MMG any problems or issues.

Steph Tyler

Open Days 2027

As winter approaches, the MMG Committee is already thinking of sunnier and warmer days next summer. Hopefully our MMG Open Meadows 2027 will prove to be drier than this summer!

The 2027 Open days will be on Saturday 5 June or Sunday 6 June at Alt y bela near Usk by kind permission of Arne Maynard and William Collinson; and on Sunday 13 June at Glyn Farm at Itton kindly hosted by Ruth and Richard Pugh.

On National Meadows Day, on Saturday 3 July, MMG will be hosting an Open Day with events at Wet Meadow Reserve, Trellech.


Green Winged Orchid/J Dunkelman

Flower Facts

Achillea ptarmica or Sneezewort

Sneezewort is a plant of damp, marshy ground, and can be found in small sunny patches along the ditches at our Wet Meadow reserve.

In the same family as yarrow, sneezewort bears clusters of complex flowers in flat-topped clusters at the end of the flowering stems. The individual flowerheads are around 18-20mm in diameter with a central disc of greenish-grey florets surrounded by around eight pale ray-florets. The leaves are long, thin, and sharply-toothed.

Sneezewort has a creeping rootstock, but vegetative propagation is slow and it is best propagated by seed, which germinates readily.

It has a mild, distinctive scent and can be used as a salad garnish although, as the traditional name Goose-tongue suggests, it can leave the mouth feeling a little tingly or numb! Another traditional name is Fair-maid-of-France, (although this latter is now more commonly used to describe small double white flowers of Ranunculus aconitifolius flore plano).

The dried flowers are said to be a nasal irritant, hence its more common name of Sneezewort.

Sally Jones



Sneezewort / Sally Jones

Surveys in 2026

MMG botanists have been busy surveying the land of new members this spring and re-visiting some old ones. Tim Oliver, Elsa & Adrian Wood, Lauri McClean, Wendy Tyler-Batt, Saran Allot-Davey and Sally Jones have all accompanied me at one time or another. We have visited two sites at Penrhos – the Lam Rim Buddhist Centre and a large field near the church, several sites at Gwehelog, two fields at Llangwm-isaf, two field complexes near Devauden, a large hay meadow below Star Hill, two large sites at Llangovan, a small field at Whitebrook, 80 acres of hay meadow and marshy grassland at Newton Court Farm near Monmouth, a large field at Lydart House on Lydart Hill, woodland and fields near Cross Ash and the wonderful SSSI grasslands at Allt y bela and at Box Bush near Capel y fin. All the sites have been of interest and amazingly this year Green-winged Orchids were found at several sites. (Photo p.7)

Trevor Evans in his Flora of Monmouthshire noted this spring-flowering nationally threatened orchid as present in 18 tetrads (2k x 2km squares). Since 2000 we have records in 32 tetrads!

The excitement of new finds

It is always exciting and rewarding when a new species turns up on your patch. In 2026 there was a spate of first sightings of Green-winged Orchids. One turned up in a field at Itton belonging to Alison and Keith Jenkins, another in a hay field belonging to Ruth and Mark Rose at Court St Lawrence at Llangovan, one in Jon and Marilyn Dunkelman's fields at The Narth, two in Mary Field's fields at Trostrey and three were found on the A449 Usk roundabout, and near The Hoop at New Mills.

Southern Marsh Orchid turned up in the Attewell's new property at Gwehelog whilst other 'new' species included Betony and Lousewort found by Sally Jones at Lower Pantygoida Farm, and Lousewort in the Wet Meadow reserve at Trellech.

Twayblades at The Vedw in the garden created by Ann Wareham and Charles Hawes and many in some newly acquired small fields above the garden.

Broad-leaved Helleborine at Llanvapley reported by Penny Harding in her garden and more near Llanishen at Jonathan Dimbleby's cottage where Fairy Flax and Milkwort were found 'new' to his meadows.

Meadow Barley, a grass scarce away from the Levels, was found by Pip Morrison in his amazing field at Crosshands south of Llansoy.

Steph Tyler

Book review

Restoring the Wild
by Donald MacIntyre

An extremely erudite book from a man who spent over 40 years growing and selling wildflower seed in order to restore and create meadows across the UK. There is a certain amount of serious botany and plant genetics in this book, but the chapters are short and readable. This is the definitive guide to meadow restoration and creation, all beautifully illustrated. There are also useful individual species accounts.

Having used Emorsgate seeds (the premier supplier of quality wildflower seeds in the UK) for many years, I thoroughly enjoyed delving into its history and learning much in the process.

Restoring the Wild by Donald MacIntyre is available as a hardback from wildseed.co.uk at £24.

Sally Jones



Gwehelog Cluster

Wildlife clusters refer to distinct, highly biodiverse zones connected by these corridors to ensure species resilience across fragmented landscapes. Our MMG members are creating clusters of small and medium-sized meadows in a geographical patch.

At our autumn 2025 meeting in Gwehelog, three local landowners shared their experiences of their own meadows and pastures. The enthusiasm of these three individuals inspired others to become involved, and we now have a network of 12 members in the Gwehelog and Llandenny area who have developed a cluster over 180 acres for the benefit of local wildlife; so creating something more valuable than the sum of its parts.

Together, they are inspiring their friends and neighbours to join them in expanding a nature friendly network. Helped by our volunteer botanist, Tim Oliver they have developed their plant identification skills, and are learning together. Not only are they benefiting nature in this area, but they are also helping nature across the landscape, allowing plants, pollinators and other wildlife to move more freely between meadows and other habitats.

Saran Allott-Davey

Steve and Virginia Hoselitz, of Wainfield Farm, are part of the Gwehelog Cluster and have approximately 10 acres of meadows. They reflect on this summer:

'It was wonderful to see the golden grasses quivering in the breeze. We know the drought was challenging, but it is great to see the speed with which things seem to have normalised now that we've had a splash of rain. And isn't it interesting to see what appeared to be undaunted by the heat and the drought: brambles and the bracken among other things of course!

It has also been a brilliant year for butterflies and moths – the warm September continued to suit them.'


Brambles / Saran Allot-Davey

The Big Meadow Search Project

I enjoyed the opportunity to give a presentation about our project and to chat to members of Monmouthshire Meadows Group at the recent autumn meeting on garden meadows. I hope I managed to demonstrate that wild gardens/garden meadows are really important at providing food plants for a wide range of insects as well as pollinator resources and are potentially as important as traditional hay meadows in this regard.

We (the Carmarthenshire Meadows Group) started the project in 2021 with the aim of getting people across the UK, Ireland and the Channel Islands to record plant species in a wide variety of grasslands ranging from hay meadows to road verges, churchyards, amenity grasslands, woodland rides, business parks and wild gardens. In order to help people get involved and to increase interest and appreciation of grasslands, we launched ourselves onto four social media platforms (Facebook, X, Bluesky and Instagram) and started posting plant ID tips. We then started to highlight the associations between plants and other species such as moths, butterflies, fungi and galls and this seems to have been the best way to increase people's interest in plants.

The plant recording part of the project runs between 1 June and 31 August each year and we are currently in the process of analysing the data from the first 5 years. As well as reporting on the numbers of searches undertaken and plant species recorded, we are looking at the data for each of the different grassland site types in terms of the ranking of species reported, the breakdown of negative and positive indicator species and the potential associations with insects and pollinators.
The maps below show the locations of search sites from the first five years.





As you can see, we have had participants submitting records from Monmouthshire but we would really like to increase the coverage in your area. If you are interested in plants and want a new challenge for 2027, why not take part? You may be familiar with species on your own land but have you taken a closer look at your local churchyard, road verge or amenity grassland? You might be surprised by what you can find. You don't need to be an expert botanist as you only need to record the species you are confident to identify. You can find details on how to take part and how to submit your results on our website.

If you use social media and would like to improve your identification skills and knowledge of how plants fit in with other species, then please start to follow us. If you aren't a social media user, we have compiled a wide range of our identification and association posts into two books. (See page 11 for details.)

For those of you who were able to attend, I hope my presentation has got you looking more closely at your local green spaces. If you have any questions about the project, you can get in touch with me on bigmeadowsearch@gmail.com

Laura Moss
(Big Meadow Search Project Lead)

Big Meadow Search Book 1*: A guide to grassland indicator plants and some of their associated species.* Covers all of the species on the Big Meadow Search species list which comprises National Plant Monitoring Scheme Lowland Grassland Indicator Species plus additional grassland species of interest. Colour photos of each plant species with identification features and a selection of associated species (invertebrates, fungi and galls). Published April 2023. A4 size, 161 pages. £10 plus £2.70 postage.

Big Meadow Search Book 2*: More plants and associated species*. Published March 2025. Covers another 200+ plant species. Colour photos of each plant species with identification features and a selection of their associated species (invertebrates, fungi and galls). A4 size, 201 pages. £10 plus £2.70 postage.





Please contact: bigmeadowsearch@gmail.com to order.

Payment by cheque, PayPal or BACS.

There's a hole in my bucket — and a whole lot of life too!

This spring after waiting four years for the fanfare of colour the label on the miniature water lilies promised, I decided to abandon all hopes of a Monet-esque water feature and to pull the plug, literally, on my wee water feature which is not much larger than a washing up bowl. Fortunately, a neighbour had mentioned a visiting badger to our gardens and with the prospect of glimpsing it, I decided to keep the bowl in situ and to invest in an outdoor camera —surely a badger would come for a drink!

I've still not seen a badger but what I did capture instead was amazing…
My small bucket seemingly contained nothing but lifeless dark water with a single malformed water lily —so lifeless that even the water snails that I'd carefully released into the bucket had abandoned hope and headed off to pastures new, or so I'd assumed when I'd found them strewn around the garden a few days later. Imagine my surprise to discover that my bucket appears to be the local baths and watering hole for so many wonderful garden birds and wildlife including a large thrush —which might explain the scattered snails— as well as bullfinches, greenfinches, juvenile woodpeckers, blackbirds and jackdaws. At night it appears to be popular with a wood mouse and early morning visitors include squirrels and a rabbit.

I'm so pleased that I didn't abandon it and I'm now wondering where else I might be able to position a second and third water feature, along with a sign of course saying 'smile you're on camera'.

Nicole Dobbin





Small Can Be Beautiful: Building a Nature Garden

Living in a city flat was never my dream, but the practicalities of having a job based right in the heart of Westminster and a specialism that often required out of hours call ins at short notice, a long commute just wasn't workable and London house prices meant apartment living was the only option financially. It was thus one of the biggest joys when I finally retired, returned home to south Wales and could finally achieve my dream of having a house and my very own garden.



That's my garden - those are not my sheep.

My new home is a 228-year-old Welsh stone cottage situated alongside the beautiful Monmouthshire and Brecon canal. When I moved in neighbours excitedly told me the story of a gruesome murder that took place there nearly 100 years ago, eager to see my reaction, but for me the cottage has always had a warm and welcoming aura ever since I first set foot in it. The previous owners had carried out extensive renovations, but the garden had remained untended for many years. In winter it was mostly a rough looking lawn, and in summer rapidly sprouted into an overgrown tangle of dock, thistle, nettles and bramble. An unstable old stone piggery stood in the centre of it. Gaps in the hedgerow meant escapee sheep from the next-door farm were not infrequent visitors and whilst it was certainly wild, there was nothing in it to actively encourage varied, rare or interesting species.

Having no gardening experience at all, I was, and still am, entirely reliant on the advice of others, first and foremost the garden designer I selected, Dean Peckett. I also found a proper craftsman of a stonemason, Darren Kershaw, to make the old piggery safe and build and stabilise walls.

The brief was pretty simple. I knew I wanted two things; an outdoor entertaining space and then for the rest of the garden to be as nature friendly as possible. Whilst I initially had high hopes of adapting what was already there, it very quickly became clear that the extent to which the brambles and other unwanted species were dug in meant the only realistic path forward was to strip the surface and start again. The garden I had dreamt of felt a very long way away.

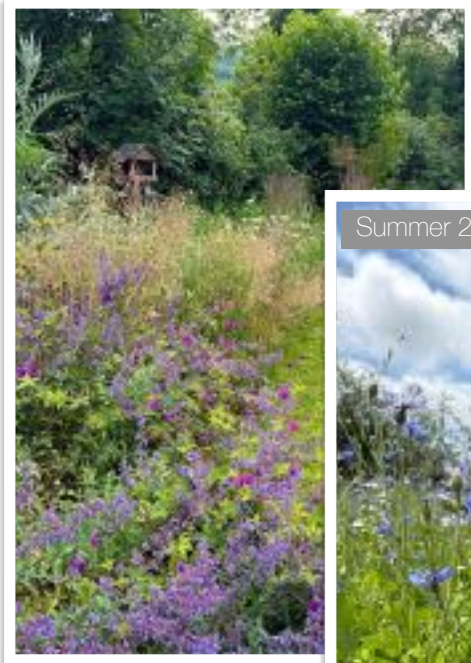


This is not the biodiversity I had hoped for.

I've done my best to contribute towards the low-skill elements of the task, mostly fetching, carrying and weeding, but I have to credit Dean with the lion's share of what the garden has become. MMG's own senior botanist Steph has visited and her advice was really helpful. When you have a garden rather than larger landholdings there are four things worth prioritising for nature: flowering plants for the pollinators, a compost heap that will hopefully become home to snakes, some good hedgerows with a variety of native species, and a pond. Thankfully I have enough space for all four. A pond has been dug, hawthorn has been planted to fill in hedgerow gaps and flowers are now abundant. Additionally bird and bat boxes are hung and a woodpile built in a hidden, shady corner acts as an additional invertebrate habitat.

The thing that has astounded me most is just how fast the plants have grown and turned a barren lawn into a wildlife garden that buzzes and hums with life all summer. I continue to look for ways to encourage new species to the garden and parts of it are still a work in progress, but I hope it can demonstrate just how quickly wildlife will return once you create opportunities for it to do so, even in an average sized garden.

Siân Jones











A Mystery Fungus

There is always something new to discover in the fungi world.

Last year, in October, I was doing my usual round of my grounds to see if there were any more waxcaps about when I spotted a slightly odd-looking fungus in the grass just outside the South Field.

The reason it was odd-looking to me was because it looked very similar in colour to a common fungus called Plums and Custard (*Tricholomopsis rutilans*) but it was not growing on rotting conifer wood. Also, the cap shape looked wrong and it was a single specimen. Plums and Custard often occurs in twos and threes growing out of or close to conifer wood.

I got out the fungi books and one of them (Kibby's *Mushrooms and Toadstools of Britain and Europe Volume 2*) listed a species called Bracken Plums and Custard (*Tricholomopsis pteridicola*). Kibby says this is found "on soil associated with *Pteridium aquilinum*. Not officially British but possibly present based on one recent observation".

The description was perfect for my specimen and I realised that the irritating piece of dead bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) that was in my photograph was actually further evidence that I had found this species.

However, a find of a specimen that is not yet confirmed as a UK species requires some serious confirmation before it can formally be added to the British list. I thought that DNA was the way to go and I found someone who agreed to help me get the specimen sequenced.

Meanwhile I was also in touch with local mycologists and one, Peter Roberts, had found what sounded like exactly the same species some years ago in Bannau Brycheiniog.



The Mystery Fungus! / Jon Dunkelman

This had never been confirmed through DNA or other means so was not on the official list of UK species.

Wind forward a few months and I received the result but it was not what I expected to hear. The notice read:

> "Your collection is not *T. pteridicola*, but sits with some other collections which appear unnamed. The sequence was identical to one from Cornwall and one from Spain, both labelled as *Tricholomopsis sp*. …
>
> ...so an interesting collection and worth depositing at Kew. Perhaps one day someone will assign a name to species in your clade"

I went through the Kew process and so now my dried specimen is in the Kew Fungarium, albeit without a specific name.

Now I still have some doubts about this, although I admit my understanding of DNA sequencing is minimal. The specimen seemed perfect for *T. pteridicola*. I had one thought – maybe the genetic database has been wrongly assigned and what it thinks is *T.pteridicola* is in fact something else? But for the moment Bracken Plums and Custard is still not a confirmed UK species and my find is still unnamed and just *Tricholomopsis sp*.

Jon Dunkelman


Blackening waxcap / Jon Dunkelman


Citrine waxcap / Jon Dunkelman


Scarlet waxcap / Jon Dunkelman


Pink waxcap / Jon Dunkelman


Yellow Foot waxcap / Jon Dunkelman


Blushing waxcap / Jon Dunkelman


Meadow waxcap / Jon Dunkelman


Splendid waxcap / Jon Dunkelman

Do You Know Someone Who Deserves Honorary Membership of MMG?

As many of you will know, the last couple of years have seen significant changes in the group of people who volunteer as trustees to run MMG. We have been fortunate enough to inherit a well-run, friendly, flourishing organisation that continues to increase its membership and impact across this beautiful county. Despite the changes, we are determined that the huge amount of work that was put in over many years by those people who established and ran MMG in its early years is not lost from the group's collective tribal memory. For that reason we have created a small group of Honorary Lifetime Memberships to recognise, in a small way, those whose vision, knowledge and commitment was essential to getting the organisation off the ground.

The initial list of Honorary Lifetime Members is below, but if you know someone who you believe should be added to the group, please get in touch with our Chairperson, Sally, to give her your nominations. Thank you so much.

Marilyn and Jonathan Dunkelman
Marilyn didn't just run MMG for over ten years, she was MMG. A force of nature who cares passionately about every single member and created the organisation we have today. Her technical expertise was invaluable for our publications and events. Jon's contribution to MMG continues to this day through his wonderful field guide to grassland fungi.

Bill and Caroline Howard
Bill and his wife Caroline were essential to the success of MMG from its beginning. Bill was a committee member, tractor driver and regular volunteer who cut grasslands and made hay. Caroline was a knowledgeable botanist and conducted surveys and training days for members. She was also a brilliant cook providing delicious food for the autumn and spring meetings.

Peter and Pam Lloyd
Peter and Pam have supported MMG in many ways including giving advice and donations through their New Grove Trust fund. They helped on numerous work tasks and at Open Days and Pam was on the committee for many years.

Steph and Alan Poulter
Steph and Alan organised the purchase of our two Exmoor Ponies back in the early 2000s and continued to care for them for over 20 years. They hosted MMG committee meetings at their home in Trellech for over 20 years with tea and goodies thrown in. They also collected raffle prizes and sold tickets at many of our indoor events to raise money for the Group.

Stephanie Tyler, MBE
Our lead ecologist, Steph has been part of MMG since its inception in 2003. She has irrepressible energy and an encyclopaedic knowledge of the natural world. MMG wouldn't be MMG without her.

Elsa and Adrian Wood
Elsa is co-author, with Jon Dunkelman, of the wonderful field guide to grassland fungi. She has also worked with Steph on numerous surveys of grassland for new MMG members.

Useful guides

Here are some suggestions to while away those rapidly approaching long winter evenings.



Grassland Fungi: a field guide, *3rd Edition*
Elsa Wood and Jon Dunkelman
Produced by MMG volunteers, the proceeds from this guide go towards Monmouthshire Meadows Group's work in helping to conserve the species-rich grasslands in which these fungi thrive.

Buy online direct from our distributor nhbs.com or order through your local bookshop.
Retail price £24.99
ISBN 978-0-9576424-3-0



Orchid Observer's Identification Guide

Published by the Natural History Museum, this guide introduces 29 species of UK orchid and gives details of how to identify them and where they may be found. On each page there is a photo of the orchid and a written description; notes on habitat and a UK distribution map; usual flowering dates; and notes on similar species.

Download free NHM pdf



Classes for Grasses

The National Plant Monitoring Scheme offers a number of free, online training resources.

If you want to brush up on your grass ID skills, *Classes for Grasses* is a two part video available on You Tube.

Classes for Grasses 1: Grass Structure and Anatomy, explores the terminology and features of grasses.

Funding opportunity

Bannau Brycheiniog National Park

Capital grants of up to £5,000 are available for practical projects within BBNP.

Examples include:
Enhancement of spaces for wildlife and increase wildflower areas; woodland management, tree planting or hedgerow creation; planting to reduce flood risk; tackling invasive non-native species.

All work must be completed by 9th March 2027.

For further details - BBNP

Contact MMG

- queries@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk
- The MMG Newsletter is semi-annual, with spring and autumn editions. We love to learn about our members' meadow experiences and very much welcome contributions and photos from our MMG members. To get in touch, please email the editor Clare Adamson: news@monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk
- 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
- Follow us on social media: Facebook and Instagram