

Wildflower Meadows in Monmouthshire

Ten years of conserving and
restoring flower-rich grasslands



Monmouthshire Meadows Group

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Front cover

New Grove Meadows, Ray Armstrong

Back cover

Butterfly-orchid, Keith Moseley

Fibrous Waxcap, Jon Dunkelman

Green-winged Orchid, Keith Moseley

Heath Spotted-orchid, Keith Moseley

Ox-eye Daisies at Tymawr Convent, Keith Moseley

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Contents

Foreword <i>by Kate Humble</i>	2
From our President	2
Introduction <i>Stephanie Tyler, Chair of Monmouthshire Meadows Group</i>	3
Monmouthshire Meadows Group Grasslands <i>Stephanie Tyler and Sheelagh Kerry</i>	5
Grassland Management	11
Conservation Grazing <i>Stephanie Poulter</i>	12
Making Hay on Members' Fields <i>Bill Howard</i>	13
Members' Stories: Farms & Smallholdings	16
Ty Major, Forest Coal Pit <i>Sheelagh Kerry</i>	16
Lower Glyn Farm <i>Amanda Copp</i>	17
Seventeen Years at Upper Red House <i>Teona Dorrien-Smith</i>	19
Little Mill Farm <i>Ann Eggleton</i>	21
Members' Stories: Smaller Acreage.....	22
Kinsons Farm Meadow, Whitebrook <i>Sarah Cheese</i>	22
Far Barn Hay Meadow <i>Glynis Laws</i>	23
The Story of Northridge Meadows <i>Ann Robinson</i>	25
On Coming to The Narth – 1969 to 1999 <i>Ida Dunn</i>	27
Stevenstone Meadow, Lydart <i>Barbara Newby</i>	29
Manorside, The Narth <i>Vera Easton</i>	29
Hay Rattle and Roll - Bringing Life to a Green Desert <i>Jeremy Harris & Clare Adamson</i>	31
Members' Stories: Community Projects	34
Shirenewton & Mynyddbach Fields Association <i>Alison Broughton</i>	34
Members' Stories: Gardens.....	36
The Brooks <i>Marion Stainton</i>	36
Discovering the Meadow in your Garden <i>Gilly Pollock</i>	37
Veddw <i>Anne Wareham</i>	39
Wildlife Conservation Partners.....	41
Gwent Wildlife Trust	41
Bumblebee Conservation Trust.....	42
Parish Grasslands Project <i>George Peterken</i>	42
Dean Meadows Group <i>Derek Foster</i>	44
Looking Forward – Our Aims for the Next Ten Years.....	46
Funding Partners	47

Foreword

by *Kate Humble*

A decade ago, a small group of like-minded folk from Whitebrook and Penallt were concerned at the loss or deterioration of old meadows and pastures. Lack of management, new houses, ploughing and tree planting were all taking their toll on these invaluable, yet often disregarded, areas of the British countryside. Meadows and grasslands that are properly managed are havens not just for an enormous range of grasses and flowering plants, but an invaluable habitat for insects and other invertebrates, that in turn support a whole host of other creatures, from the tiny shrew to the majestic Barn Owl. The inaugural meeting of the Monmouthshire Meadows Group was held in Trellech in 2003 and it now has 150 members with well over 600 acres of land between them. The advice and support the group has given – and been given – over the years has made a real and



tangible benefit to the county's grasslands. New meadows have been created as well as old ones restored; local seed is gathered, mini meadows have been encouraged in gardens and churchyards. In short it has been a busy decade that has achieved much. The Monmouthshire Meadows Group may have started small, just a few people who wanted to make a difference, but make a difference they have and our county is all the richer in wildlife and beautiful places thanks to them.

Kate Humble

From our President

Having been promoting conservation all my adult life, and a member of the Botanical Society for the British Isles (BSBI) and four Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire recording and conservation bodies much of that time, I have been disappointed in the number of species of plants and animals of all kinds that have become extinct or on the point of extinction in our county alone. When Stephanie Tyler introduced me to the Monmouthshire Meadows Group I was immediately impressed with its aims and the enthusiasm of its officers. I noticed how this enthusiasm was transferring to local people who had land and were prepared to make efforts to restore their land to a more friendly environment for wildlife. The Group's newsletter was informative, showed members working to achieve its aims, advertised forthcoming events and reached out to people from neighbouring areas to join its conservation aims. From acorns mighty oaks develop. When I was honoured to be invited to act as president of such a forward-looking society, I was delighted to accept.

Trevor Evans MBE



Trevor Evans MBE (Ann Robinson)

Introduction

Stephanie Tyler, Chair of Monmouthshire Meadows Group

This modest book is to mark and celebrate ten years of work by the Monmouthshire Meadows Group (MMG).

During 2002, several concerned conservationists in the Trellech area had discussed the loss locally of old species-rich meadows and pastures in the Wye Valley. The loss of such grassland in Britain as a whole since the Second World War has been estimated at a staggering 97-98%. Farmers were encouraged in the post-war years to plough up their old pastures, fertilise the soil and reseed with Rye-grass and White Clover. Such agricultural intensification – ploughing and reseeding – has destroyed many former good sites in Monmouthshire; housing development and tree-planting has accounted for many other losses.

There was also concern that other small grassland sites were still being lost, mainly due to neglect. Simply doing nothing to a grassland site inevitably results in its deterioration and the loss of plant and animal life. The grassland becomes tussocky and dominated by coarser grasses such as Cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*. Fine grasses and wildflowers soon get out-competed and swamped with vegetation. Brambles and scrub invade and all too soon the grassland has become woodland.

Some flower-rich fields were planted with trees during the 1990s. The current vogue for planting more trees is fine so long as the trees are planted in the right places. The last place they should go is on remnant flower-rich grasslands. Sadly, there are many examples in Monmouthshire where landowners have planted trees on such land with the encouragement of Forestry Commission grants. Woodland is, of course, an important habitat but in the Lower Wye Valley we have plenty of broad-leaved and mixed woodlands. Unimproved (agriculturally) species-rich grassland is by comparison rare.

Monmouthshire is fortunate in that, especially on the Trellech Plateau in tributary valleys of the Wye, and in the Wentwood area, many small, steep fields have escaped agricultural intensification. Many belong to people who have bought a house in the country with a few acres attached. However, many of these landowners have no or limited farming experience, no machinery and no livestock; hence some of the fields were suffering from a lack of management – no hay-cutting and no grazing.

Across the border in Gloucestershire, the same concerns had motivated Peter Chard and George Peterken to set up the Parish Grasslands Project in 2002. Not to be outdone, concerned landowners in Monmouthshire organised a meeting on 29 January 2003 at The Babington Centre in Trellech and invited local landowners. From that meeting the Monmouthshire Meadows Group was formed. Key players included: Diana Bevan as Chairman; Maggie Biss as Secretary; Bill Howard as Treasurer; and Steph Poulter, Steph Tyler, Caroline Howard, Jill Featherstone, June Holmes, Steve Davies and Adrian Wood as committee members.



Stephanie Tyler receiving the GreenWeb Environment Award on behalf of the Group in 2010. The Award was presented by Dick Coles of the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations for our work during the year (Picture GAVO)

Initially the Group focused on Eastern Monmouthshire. Display boards about meadows on the Welsh and English sides of the valley were sited at Tintern Railway Station and Trellech Community Car Park. The boards are still at these sites and depict a map showing areas of good grassland in the Wye Valley, and a scene by local artist Helen Scourse shows grassland abounding with flowers, birds, mammals and insects. It was soon decided that MMG would spread to embrace the whole county as well as support members in adjacent Welsh counties, and in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire.

MMG carries out a survey of land owned by every new member and provides the landowner with a plant list and advice on how to manage their land to enhance the grassland flowers, bees, butterflies and other insects and other wildlife. MMG provides lists of local contractors and graziers who may help, and sometimes provides practical help with its own machinery or ponies or with work parties involving volunteers. For example, MMG has helped Sister Gillian Fraser and the nuns at Tymawr Convent with management of their wonderful meadow in the orchard and with the wet pasture down along the White Brook. Tymawr has been a popular venue for our Open Days and the nuns have hosted several events, including providing tea for the Minister Carwen Jones in 2006 when he came



Plant identification training day with Caroline Howard at the Newby's meadow (Margaret Biss)

to present us with an award and to look at some of our sites.

MMG has also helped schools and churchyards to establish or manage their own wildflower meadows and has given advice to diverse bodies. These include Monmouth Millennium Meadows group, Torfaen Borough County Council with its attempts to restore Llanyrafon hay meadow, and Cwmbran Community Farm in its development of a hay meadow.

With well over 100 members, the Group influences management of over 600 acres, from mini-meadows in gardens and churchyards to hay meadows and pastures on small farms. It aims to spread the word about the importance of flower-rich grassland to the general public through talks, meetings and open days. It also helps members to identify the plants in their own fields and has held several plant identification days for interested persons.

In this book you will find sections on management of meadows and pastures and on grassland types, and then some of MMG's members have contributed articles about their own patches and about the pleasures and pains of managing their own grasslands.

Stephanie Tyler



Our first chairman, Diana Bevan, in New Grove Meadows (Margaret Biss)

Monmouthshire Meadows Group Grasslands

Stephanie Tyler and Sheelagh Kerry

Grassland types

Agricultural improvement has caused the loss of the majority of semi-natural grassland in lowland Britain. Semi-natural grassland is thus a scarce and declining resource; the amount remaining in Monmouthshire is probably less than 2,000 ha (5,000 acres)¹. The least modified grassland is of great conservation value and should be conserved and enhanced by appropriate management and designation as Local Wildlife Sites².

Many lucky MMG members have a field or two of species-rich grassland. Most such grasslands in eastern Monmouthshire are best described as semi-improved neutral grassland (i.e., grassland on neutral soils, neither acidic nor calcareous in nature, with a pH 5.5 to 7.0). Those sites with the greatest diversity of plant species and the least amount of agricultural improvement fit the grassland type *Cynosurus cristatus* – *Centaurea nigra* community (MG5) of the National Vegetation Classification³. Table 1 shows the grassland types found in Monmouthshire and the species associated with each type. MG5 is the grassland type that most meadows' owners should aspire to and management should be tailored to help in achieving this.

Not all MMG members have species-rich grassland; some have inherited or

acquired agriculturally improved fields with very few plants other than Rye-grass and Dandelions. With some agricultural improvement, for example, fertilizer applications, overgrazing or ploughing and reseedling (even if this has occurred many decades ago), the grassland will be less diverse. However, with time and appropriate management, these grasslands can be enhanced.

The key is to reduce nutrients – nitrates and phosphates – by repeated silage or hay cuts and close grazing, and NEVER to add fertiliser. In a soil of low nutrient value a diversity of plants can flourish as they will not be out-competed by lush grass growth. Once soil fertility is sufficiently reduced you can speed things up by scattering green hay or seed collected from flower-rich meadows or by introducing plug plants. Avoid using fungicides as some plants, notably orchids, have a close symbiotic association with soil fungi.



Common Spotted-orchids & grasses at Tymawr Convent meadows (Keith Moseley)

*For a fuller description of grasslands (and other habitats) in Monmouthshire do take a look at Trevor Evan's wonderful **Flora of Monmouthshire** ⁴. Trevor is the MMG President and has been very supportive of the Group. He produced his Flora in 2007 when he was over 80.*

¹ Westwood, S., Kerry, S., Lindley, C. & Hurford, C. (1995). A Habitat Survey of the County of Gwent. Countryside Council for Wales, Bangor

² Gwent Wildlife Trust (2004). Guidelines for the Selection of Wildlife Sites in South Wales. The South Wales Wildlife Trust Sites Partnership

³ Rodwell, J.S. (Ed.) (1992). British Plant Communities, Volume 3: Grasslands and montane habitats. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

⁴ Evans, T.G. (2007). The Flora of Monmouthshire. The Chepstow Society, Chepstow

Table 1. Grassland community types in Monmouthshire and associated plant species (Species in bold are ‘indicator species’ of neutral, calcareous, acidic or marshy grassland) ²

Code	Community type	Characteristic species
MG5	<i>Cynosurus cristatus</i> – <i>Centaurea nigra</i> Neutral. Least agriculturally improved. Species-rich	Crested Dog’s-tail <i>Cynosurus cristatus</i> , Common Bent <i>Agrostis capillaris</i> , Red Fescue <i>Festuca rubra</i> , Sweet Vernal Grass <i>Anthoxanthum odoratum</i> , Common Knapweed <i>Centaurea nigra</i> , Bird’s-foot Trefoil <i>Lotus corniculatus</i> , Red Clover <i>Trifolium pretense</i> , Meadow Vetchling <i>Lathyrus pratensis</i> , Yellow-rattle <i>Rhinanthus minor</i> , Ox-eye Daisy <i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i> , Common Spotted-orchids <i>Dactylorhiza fuchsii</i> , Common Milkwort <i>Polygala vulgaris</i> , Southern Lady’s Mantle <i>Alchemilla filicaulis</i> , Harebell <i>Campanula rotundifolia</i> , and Field Scabious <i>Knautia arvensis</i> . <i>Rarer species:</i> Green-winged Orchid <i>Anacamotis morio</i> , Greater Butterfly-orchids <i>Platanthera chlorantha</i> , Common Twayblades <i>Neottia ovata</i> , Burnet Saxifrage <i>Pimpinella saxifrage</i> , Pepper Saxifrage <i>Silaum silaus</i>
MG5b	<i>Galium verum</i> Neutral with a calcareous element	As MG5, plus: Yellow Oat-grass <i>Trisetum flavescens</i> , Lady’s Bedstraw <i>Galium verum</i> , Burnet Saxifrage, Salad Burnet <i>Sanguisorba minor</i> and Agrimony <i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>
MG5c	<i>Danthonia decumbens</i> Slightly more acidic soils	As MG5, plus: Common Heath-grass <i>Danthonia decumbens</i> , Spring Sedge <i>Carex caryophylla</i> , Tormentil <i>Potentilla erecta</i> , Slender St John’s-wort <i>Hypericum pulchrum</i> , Heath Speedwell <i>Veronica officinalis</i> , Heath Milkwort <i>Polygala serpyllifolia</i> , Lousewort <i>Pedicularis sylvatica</i> , Pignut <i>Conopodium majus</i> , Betony <i>Stachys officinalis</i> and Devil’s-bit Scabious <i>Succisa pratensis</i>
MG6	<i>Lolium perenne</i> – <i>Cynosurus cristatus</i> Some agricultural improvement	Grasses more dominant. Also: Common Cat’s-ear <i>Hypochaeris radicata</i> , Common Sorrel <i>Rumex acetosa</i> , Buttercups <i>Ranunculus</i> species, Ribwort Plantain <i>Plantago lanceolata</i> and White Clover <i>Trifolium repens</i>
MG1	<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i> Neglected grassland	False Oat-grass <i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i> , Cocksfoot, Yorkshire Fog <i>Holcus lanatus</i> , creating a tussocky sward. Hogweed <i>Heracleum sphondylium</i> , Common Nettle <i>Urtica dioica</i> and thistle <i>Cirsium</i> species
MG10	<i>Holcus lanatus</i> – <i>Juncus effusus</i> Wet or damp	Soft Rush <i>Juncus effusus</i> , Yorkshire Fog, Creeping Bent <i>Agrostis stolonifera</i> , Greater Bird’s-foot Trefoil <i>Lotus pedunculatus</i>
M23	<i>Juncus</i> – <i>Galium palustre</i> Marshy	Rushes <i>Juncus</i> species, Bents <i>Agrostis</i> species, Sweet Vernal Grass, Red Fescue, Yorkshire Fog, Marsh Willowherb <i>Epilobium palustre</i> , Marsh Bedstraw <i>Galium palustre</i> , Greater Bird’s-foot Trefoil , Water Mint <i>Mentha aquatica</i> , Lesser Spearwort <i>Ranunculus flammula</i> and Meadowsweet <i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>
U4	<i>Festuca ovina</i> – <i>Agrostis capillaris</i> – <i>Galium saxatile</i> Base-poor soils	Short sward with mosses amongst Sheep’s Fescue <i>Festuca ovina</i> , and other fine grasses, Heath Bedstraw <i>Galium saxatile</i> , Field Woodrush <i>Luzula campestris</i> and Tormentil Overlying quartz conglomerate: Heather <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> , Bell Heather <i>Erica cinerea</i> and Wavy Hair-grass <i>Deschampsia flexuosa</i>
CG3	<i>Bromopsis erecta</i> Calcareous	Yellow-wort <i>Blackstonia perfoliata</i> , Centaury <i>Centaureum erythraea</i> , Smooth Hawksbeard <i>Crepis capillaris</i> and Fairy Flax <i>Linum catharticum</i>
G1	<i>Festuca ovina</i> – <i>Carlina vulgaris</i> Calcareous	As CG3, plus: Quaking grass <i>Briza media</i> , Greater Knapweed <i>Centaurea scabiosa</i> , Autumn Lady’s-tresses <i>Spiranthes spiralis</i> and Grass Vetchling <i>Lathyrus nissolia</i>
CG10	<i>Festuca ovina</i> , <i>Agrostis capillaris</i> – <i>Thymus polytrichus</i> Base-rich Old Red Sandstone	Heath Bedstraw , Bird’s-foot Trefoil, Tormentil, Spring Sedge, Carlina Thistle <i>Carlina vulgaris</i> , Mouse-ear Hawkweed <i>Pilosella officinarum</i> and Autumn Hawkbit <i>Leontodon autumnalis</i>

Invertebrates

Grasshoppers, bees, butterflies, ants and moths all benefit from flower-rich grassland, and from poorer grasslands provided these are allowed to grow during the spring and early summer. Relatively common grassland butterflies include Orange-tips, Meadow Browns, Ringlets, Common Blues and Gatekeepers but bonus species are Marbled Whites, Dingy or Grizzled Skippers and Small Coppers. Bumblebees abound in flower-rich grassland. From March to September, bees need a source of nectar and pollen so it is important to ensure some late-flowering plants such as Knapweed and Scabious are left at the edges if your field is cut for hay in July.

Garden lawns

Lawns, unless they have been recently reseeded, can make wonderful mini-meadows. Simply stop mowing them after the end of March and allow the grass to grow through the spring and early summer. Then cut and rake off after mid-July. You may be pleasantly surprised at what appears. Some members have noticed Spotted-orchids appearing as soon as mowing ceases. Winding mown paths through the mini-meadows can enable you to walk among the grasses and flowers.



Six-spot Burnet on Common Knapweed (Ray Armstrong)

Churchyards and road verges

Remnant species-rich grassland occurs in some churchyards as at Penallt Old Church and also on a few road verges. Most road verges adjacent to farmland have become enriched with fertiliser run-off and support 'thugs' such as Cocksfoot and False Oat-grass and Cow Parsnip or Hogweed; atmospheric nitrogen deposition is also a problem on all grasslands. The best road verges for wildflowers tend to be on steep banks or away from intensively managed farmland. MMG has carried out work at several churchyards (Penallt Old Church, Tintern and Abergavenny) and advised on meadow creation at others, such as at Caerwent Churchyard. The Group has also been instrumental in getting some road verges listed as roadside reserves and hence managed more sympathetically.

Wildflower seed

If you want to enhance a relatively species-poor patch of grassland then spreading green hay freshly taken from a flower-rich site is ideal. You can use wildflower seed as an alternative to green hay but be careful to always use wildflower seed of local provenance rather than



Lady's-smock (Cuckooflower) in the meadow at Tintern station (Keith Moseley)

seed from other parts of Britain or even Europe. This is so that you have the ‘right’ species and not those of continental origin. Seed companies such as PlantWild based in Herefordshire are strongly recommended; so too is seed collected from rich local sites using the Group’s and Gwent Wildlife Trust’s jointly-owned seed-harvester.



Seed throwing at Abergavenny Priory, one of our community land projects (Jill Featherstone)

The flora of MMG meadows and pastures

Grasslands belonging to members are visited by one of the Group’s botanists and a list produced for the owner. In 2011 we analysed some of our data for 120 sites. More than 280 species were recorded on the 120 sites. Approximately 200 were grassland or wetland species, including over 60 species of grasses, sedges and rushes.

The data provided detailed information about the distribution of grassland species across the sites and are available in a report produced for Environment Wales⁵.

Species diversity

Most sites had between 31 and 60 species with a few exceptional sites having 103 and 104 species. Undoubtedly, further visits to most sites would increase their species lists. Although large sites might be thought to hold more species than small sites, many small sites less than 2 acres held as many species as sites of over 10 acres.

The majority of sites held more than 10 ‘indicator species’ (neutral, acid, calcareous and marshy grassland indicators combined) with seven sites with between 31 and 41



Damp meadow plants including rushes and Ragged Robin (Teona Dorrien-Smith)

species. Just eleven sites had fewer than five species. These sites were mainly agriculturally improved fields. Sites with the greatest numbers of indicators generally contained areas of wetland – flushes, boggy patches, stream-sides or ponds – which increased the diversity.

⁵ The full report can be downloaded from our web site www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk

Local Wildlife Sites

To qualify as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) any pasture or meadow must contain eight or more indicators of neutral or calcareous grassland, seven or more indicators for acid grassland or 12 or more indicators of marshy grassland. The indicators must be widespread and frequent within the site. Up to 2011, 72 of the 120 MMG sites had been designated as, or put forward as candidates for, LWS status. From this analysis a number of other sites have been shown to meet the criteria for LWS and these and some further sites have recently been confirmed as LWSs.

When indicators of neutral grassland, often with some acidic and calcareous elements, were considered most sites held between six and 15 indicators; two exceptional sites held 36 and 38 indicators. One anomaly was Barren Strawberry *Potentilla sterilis*. This plant is given in the Guidelines as an indicator of calcareous grassland but in this study it was frequently found on MG5 neutral grassland sites.

Common Valerian *Valeriana officinalis* and Meadowsweet. Whilst 39 sites had no such indicators, 52 sites had one to five wetland indicators. The most frequent of these were Wild Angelica *Angelica sylvestris* (39 sites), Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil (46) and Wood Pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum* (22).

Nine MMG sites had 12 or more marshy grassland indicator species and so qualify as wildlife sites regardless of other indicators. However, three of these were only eligible as LWSs because they had ponds or small lakes. Two of the remaining six sites were true acid bogs with Marsh Pennywort, Marsh Violet, Bog Pimpernel and/or Heath Spotted-orchids. Three other sites along the River Wye could be described as floodplain grasslands with typical species being Meadow Cranesbill *Geranium pratense* and Creeping Yellow-cress *Rorippa sylvestris*.

Owners of Local Wildlife Sites are eligible for funding of capital works such as fencing, walling or hedge-laying to better enable sympathetic management. Many of our MMG members have benefitted from Natural



Survey at New Grove Farm for Green-winged Orchids (Keith Moseley)

Marshy grassland indicators were widespread at MMG sites, even in some well-drained pastures. Many sites had streams or flushes supporting indicators such as Bog Stitchwort *Stellaria uliginosa*, Marsh Bedstraw, Gipsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, Marsh Woundwort *Stachys palustris*,

Assets Grants administered by the Gwent Wildlife Trust.

Effects of management advice

Over 60 sites have been revisited to check on management. Most sites have been well managed and are in a satisfactory or

improved condition. The grassland flora is still diverse or has improved with, for example, less Cocksfoot clumps in some and, in several cases, much less Bramble. Only three of the sites had unfavourable management. At one site part of the meadow was mown too frequently and a wet area of interest has unfortunately been in-filled with rubble. A second site that was fenced to allow grazing has had insufficient grazing and has become rank (False Oat-grass dominated in parts) with Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and Brambles gaining ground. At a third site heavy grazing by sheep does not permit any plants to flower.

Conclusion

Many MMG members own important areas of species-rich grassland and through managing them well are contributing to

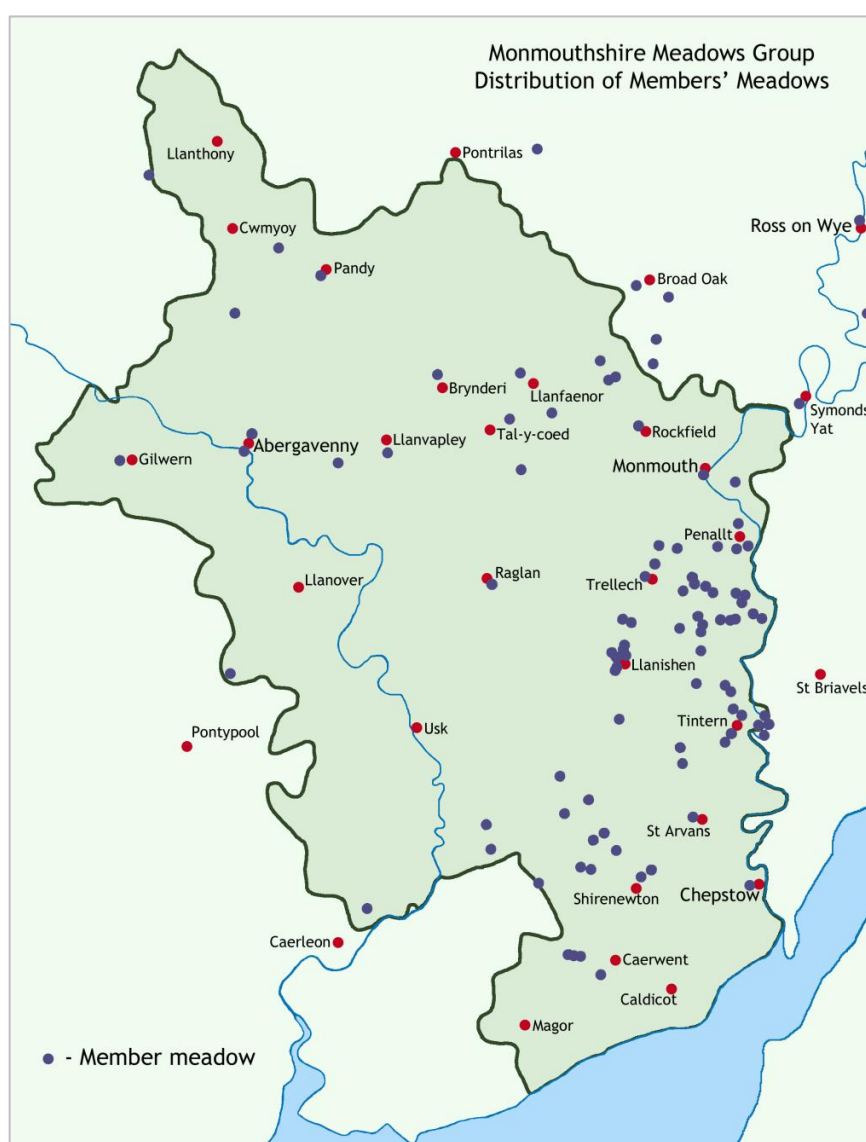
Monmouthshire County Council's Grassland Habitat Action Plan (HAP). Other members are creating or restoring areas of such grassland, again contributing to the HAP. MMG has also found some important threatened species such as Green-winged Orchid and Greater Butterfly-orchid at sites where they had not previously been recorded. Our data are fed through to South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre in Cardiff and to the Botanical Society for the British Isles through MapMate.

MMG also has members in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire and, although the results of surveys of their land were excluded from the analysis above, several such members have extremely important grasslands. One calcareous site on the Little Doward is the only known site for Wild Clary *Salvia verbenacea* in Herefordshire; sadly

there are no known sites for this rare species in Monmouthshire. A few miles further north, another Herefordshire site supports Clustered Bellflower *Campanula glomerata*.

In the future, MMG will continue to survey members' fields, orchards and/or gardens and provide advice and practical help if needed. The Gwent Wildlife Trust will be given details of those sites that meet the criteria for Local Wildlife Sites. As many sites as possible will be re-surveyed at a different time of year to that when first surveyed so that we can find species missed in the initial survey. A re-visit will be made after four to five years to a sample of sites to assess the effects of management.

There is a healthy core of loyal MMG members who are managing well a significant area of species-rich grassland distributed across Monmouthshire and beyond, as shown in the map.



Grassland Management

All species-rich grassland should either be mown for hay (hay meadows) or grazed (pastures) from mid-July. Some areas or strips could be left un-mown in alternate years to allow late flowers for bees and other insects. Ideally, after hay is cut and the grass has re-grown some aftermath grazing should occur in late autumn or winter so that there is little long vegetation by the spring. From late March make sure grazing animals are off the land to allow plants to grow, flower and set seed.

Grazing stock

When the Group formed we had plans to have roving flocks or herds of sheep and cattle to move to fields where grazing was needed. One member, for example, had Dexter cattle. However, bovine TB and the movement restrictions that came into force put paid to moving cattle about. A few members are fortunate to live adjacent to farmers with cattle that can be allowed onto their fields simply by opening a gate. In many pastures, especially those with damp areas, cattle are ideal but the next best thing is a hardy breed of pony like the Exmoors (see below). The Group relies on the goodwill of Alan and Steph Poulter to look after its ponies, trim their feet when necessary and move them to pastures new. Trampling by stock benefits seed germination by creating areas of bare soil. Cattle or ponies in this respect are better than sheep. However, sheep are the easiest animal to obtain and they do a good job.



Mole (Ray Armstrong)

Some Dos and Don'ts

DOS

1. Do take a hay cut after mid-July, and/or graze (between July and February)
2. Do remove any cut grass
3. Do try to remove horse droppings from grassland
4. Do keep nutrient levels low
5. Do control Ragwort *Senecio jacobaea* in hay meadows as it is poisonous to horses
6. Do leave ant mounds
7. Do leave any marshy or boggy areas
8. Do leave some rougher areas at the edges for invertebrate refuges
9. Do rake or harrow molehills in early spring to avoid damage to machinery

DON'TS

1. Don't add any artificial fertiliser or fungicide
2. Don't use herbicide (except Asulox on dense stands of Bracken)
3. Don't leave cut or flailed grass on your field to enrich it
4. Don't allow major encroachment by Bracken and brambles at field edges
5. Don't forget that wild flowers prefer impoverished soils

Some members live adjacent to farmers with sheep so can come to an agreement to 'borrow' the sheep from time to time. Ron Shears near Monmouth has sheep which he is prepared to move to fields in need of grazing and several members have benefitted from this arrangement.

Other livestock such as Alpacas graze sites owned by MMG members at Llanishen Far Hill and Earlswood and one member at Botany Bay uses geese to graze his fields.

Conservation Grazing

Stephanie Poulter

The Exmoor pony is usually referred to as a 'breed' but uniformity in appearance. fossil records and recent DNA evidence suggest that they are an aboriginal type of British wild pony that has remained largely unchanged since prehistoric times.

Exmoors are bay, brown or dun in colour, with dark legs, mane and tail, and hard 'blue' hooves. Characteristic pale 'mealy' markings are present around the eyes, on the muzzle and under the belly; no white hairs are allowed anywhere. They also have wide

Britain. The Exmoors' large, deep-rooted teeth give a clean bite due to incisors that meet like a pair of pliers, and are well adapted for grazing coarse vegetation. They feed mainly on grasses but also eat rushes, heather, and gorse, and will eat some of the troublesome coarser plants that cattle and sheep will not eat. Exmoors put less pressure on their environment than animals that only eat grass, and this makes year round grazing possible without supplementary feeding.

Over the past 25 years, this tough and



MMG's Exmoors, Jemima and Jacinth, with Steph and Alan Poulter (Jon Dunkelman)

foreheads and beautiful, prominent 'toad' eyes. The efficiency of their double-layered winter coat is illustrated by 'snow thatching'. Snow collects on the ponies' backs because insufficient body heat escapes to melt it.

Although only between 11hh and 13hh, Exmoors are extremely strong. In days gone by they were used as shepherding ponies on Exmoor. In the mid-1980's, Geoff Hann, then a warden with the National Trust, had the idea of introducing Exmoor ponies to graze their Seacombe Valley reserve in Dorset. The idea spread after the success of that experiment, and small groups now undertake conservation grazing in many counties of

resilient ancient breed of pony has benefited many different habitats by improving the sward, letting delicate plants such as orchids spread. In places, plants that had been competed out, such as Marsh Helleborine *Epipactis palustris* in a Lancashire reserve, and violets *Viola species* in the Quantocks reserve, have been re-established.

MMG's two Exmoor ponies, Jacinth and Jemima, were purchased from their breeder as yearling fillies in the autumn of 2006. Since then, they have been busy grazing members' fields as well as helping the Heathland Restoration project on Broadmeend, near Trellech.

Making Hay on Members' Fields

Bill Howard

Haymaking is an integral part of managing species-rich meadows. Over the decade, haymaking activities have been made possible by grants from generous funding bodies, whose assistance we gratefully acknowledge on page 47.

MMG has followed a number of approaches to haymaking:

1. Partnership with a neighbouring farmer

Traditionally, members with fields next to their houses have had their hay cut by a neighbouring farmer who would use their hay for his stock. This arrangement works well and some members continue to manage their meadows this way.

2. Partnership with Parish Grasslands

We started haymaking for MMG members in 2004, collaborating with the Parish Grasslands Project (PGP) on the purchase of an alpine tractor, a grass cutter, a tedder, a mini baler for hay and a machine for wrapping bales in plastic to make haylage. Haylage is made by wrapping grass one to two days after it is cut, while it is still green. Haylage can be made more quickly than hay in uncertain weather but has disadvantages: it requires judgement on the moisture content; the hay should not be contaminated by soil; and the wrapped bales must not be punctured by woody stalks. This arrangement with PGP continued until 2009.

3. Hiring the work out to contractors

From early years our policy has been to involve local contractors for haymaking and for other field activities, bracken-bashing and chain harrowing in the spring. There are

contractors who hire out their services, but there is a serious logistical problem in making hay in small fields over a wide area, and they may not give our members high priority if they have to travel far. Contractors often only have huge, modern equipment that cannot go down narrow lanes bordered by dry stone walls. The modern balers make big bales which need hydraulic lifting gear to move them. Each piece of machinery has to be brought to the site over a number of successive days making the costs very high and the job time consuming. The contractors' pricing allows them to make money cutting large, flat fields. However, this pricing means they may cut our members' fields at a loss and so must give them low priority.

Members can find contact details of contractors on the MMG website and can advertise their hay for sale in the MMG's *Newsletter* or on the website.

4. Using our own machinery to make hay ourselves

In early 2009, when the arrangement with PGP was terminated, we inherited a Massey Ferguson tractor and machinery, and bought a new mower, so we had a complete



Haymaking at Tymawr (Margaret Biss)

*Lindsay Tyler on MMG tractor,
tedding at Cwmcarnan
(Stephanie Tyler)*



*Seed harvester jointly owned with
Gwent Wildlife Trust (GWT)*



*Jon Dunkelman and Tracmaster
(Marilyn Dunkelman)*

set of machinery for haymaking. The hay-making team attended a course at Usk College to learn how to drive a tractor and to pick up pieces of farm machinery with a three point linkage. We adapted the tractor's hydraulic equipment to operate the baler, and provided weights to make it possible to tow the mower, which is long and heavy. The baler proved difficult to operate and eventually we replaced it with one more appropriate for the Massey Ferguson tractor.

We have encountered difficulties with machinery, weather and logistics and have found that haymaking activities run at a financial loss. However, where possible we hope to overcome these difficulties and continue to help our members with advice.

Seed harvester

We shared the purchase of an Eyre seed harvester with Gwent Wildlife Trust (GWT). The machine is pulled by a quad bike and seed is collected by drawing the seed harvester through the grass just before it is cut for hay. GWT's species-rich fields at Pentwyn and New

Grove and members' fields provide seed. After collection, the seed has to be dried in the sun before bagging up. We do not have equipment to clean the seed so it includes impurities and bits of plant debris. Seed germination is successful following autumn sowing, provided the ground is well prepared by cutting back the existing vegetation to reveal bare soil.

Tracmaster power scythe

In 2010 we purchased a Tracmaster power scythe for the project to help conserve Shrill Carder Bees in Monmouthshire. We concentrated on clearing scrub and overgrown meadows in the buffer zone in the Caerwent/Five Lanes area to the east and northeast of Newport, where the endangered bees are known to survive. The Tracmaster has also proved invaluable in clearing overgrown parts of members' fields. The machine can be transported in its own trailer and operated by one man. In order to reduce the repair bills and ensure the machine's longevity we have limited its use to operators who have had on-site training.



Spring Sedge (left) and Field Woodrush (Lindsay Tyler)

Members' Stories: Farms & Smallholdings

Ty Major, Forest Coal Pit Sheelagh Kerry

Having lived in the village of Bettws for some years we jumped at the chance to buy some land that was only one mile up the road from our house. We originally wanted to indulge our interest in nature conservation but this 19 acre parcel came with a barn in the centre of it, which we eventually converted to a house and moved in during December 2009.

The 19 acres were once the western part of a larger holding. The land faces south and slopes fairly steeply down from about 300m altitude. It is divided into seven fields, bounded by tall hedges with some mature trees, and adjoins Bryn Arw common, to which we have grazing rights. Having put in an access track, and fenced the fields, one third of the area was planted with a mix of native broadleaved trees, some of which we grow from locally sourced seed. We entered the Tir Gofal scheme soon after it started and received a grant to carry out traditional management of hay cutting and aftermath grazing.

The grassland was already of interest, having been used for grazing sheep and cattle for many years with little fertiliser input. The fields were probably all ploughed during the Second World War. We have not added any artificial fertiliser or farmyard manure during the time of our ownership and

gradually the abundance of grasses has declined and the range of wild flowers has increased. This is particularly noticeable in the

amount of Hay-rattle, which has spread to every field from a small isolated patch that appeared fairly early on. Similarly, Common Spotted-orchids are now relatively common and Cowslips *Primula veris* are slowly spreading. Other interesting and characteristic species include Bird's-foot Trefoil,

Common Knapweed, Tormentil, Pignut, Spring Sedge, Heath Grass *Danthonia decumbens* and Yellow Oat-grass. A few rarities have also been found, for example, Southern Marsh-orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa* and Adder's-tongue Fern *Ophioglossum vulgatum*. The general mix of species is characteristic of semi-improved



*Guarding the meadow: meadow flowers and Bracken
(Sheelagh Kerry)*



Ty Major from the Sugar Loaf (Sheelagh Kerry)

neutral grassland. There are several places where there are flushes and impeded drainage; here rushes dominate but also herbs, for example, Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil and Lesser Spearwort.

After 8 to 10 years of annual cutting, there is not always enough growth to warrant



Southern Marsh-orchid (Sheelagh Kerry)

a hay cut. When this is the case, we graze the fields from autumn until early winter. In 2012, the weather was too wet to get the hay cut. The fields are grazed by sheep or young cattle and, in autumn 2012, by 10 rather large and skittish horses. Luckily we have a local farmer who is willing to cut the fields (either for hay or more usually for haylage) and then provide the stock for grazing.

When Tir Gofal came to an end after 10 years, we decided not to enter the new agri-environment scheme (Glastir) because it will not allow the flexibility of management we need. For the future, we need to try to control the encroaching Bracken, either by bashing or more intensive/controlled grazing. We anticipate that the diversity of the grassland will continue to increase and help to attract and support a wide range of other wildlife. On a fine summer's day the fields are alive with all sorts of insects, especially butterflies and grasshoppers. We have found nests of Harvest Mice and saw a Barn Owl hunting over our fields for the first time in October 2012. The surrounding farmland is being increasingly heavily grazed by ever larger numbers of sheep, leaving our small patch a haven for wildlife.

Lower Glyn Farm *Amanda Copp*

We moved to Lower Glyn Farm in 2003 and were fortunate to come across MMG during our first year. The group have been a fantastic support, not just for the original survey and the plant identification workshops but for the encouragement and enthusiasm. The last 10 years have been a challenge and a joy in equal measure. I have to confess I can still only recognise a handful of plants, but I have realised it was not the plant names or the recognition of them that interested me, it was protecting the land to make sure they were still there for all the people whose passion they feed, and for birds and other wildlife. We try to manage the farm with a gentle touch, except for a ruthless zero tolerance for the invasive Himalayan



Lower Glyn Farm (Amanda Copp)

Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*. We do not use fertilizers or pesticides, and operate a low density grazing regime with our Alpacas, Jacob sheep and visiting horses.

Our valley farm has a wide range of



Jacob sheep (Amanda Copp)

habitats; the valley runs west to east so we have both south- and north-facing meadows. The upper slopes are a mix of ancient woodland, 13-year-old replanted broadleaf woodland and a small amount of larch, which we are currently felling. Running through the valley, Penarth Brook feeds a small lake.

Our two hay fields and the one we use for yurt holiday lets are cut for hay, and their status has changed from semi-improved to

unimproved grassland. We aim to give each field a perfect 'wildflower management year' every third year, a good one every second year and one year in three we accept that the field has to be used for stock first and flowers second. It seems to be working with a combination of Alpacas, sheep and horses to graze. Last year we had Common Spotted-orchids and Southern Marsh-orchids.

What do I feel proudest of? Probably the clearing of acres of Himalayan Balsam; it took three years and even now I dread spotting the purple flowers.

What has been the greatest frustration? It is a close run thing between the nettles and the brambles but I think the brambles win. I know it provides a habitat for Dormice but it really is relentless and there does not seem to be a way to get on top of it.

And finally, the greatest joy – walking through our meadows and hearing the humming of millions of insects while every step throws up clouds of bugs and the butterflies dance around our heads, while the Buzzard mews, Woodpeckers drum and the Kingfisher whistles. And I don't care how common they are, I still prefer the little Meadow Blues to those boring Dingy Skippers.

Amanda Copp: www.hiddenvalleyyurts.co.uk



Alpacas at Lower Glyn Farm (Amanda Copp)

Seventeen Years at Upper Red House

Teona Dorrien-Smith

In spring 1995, after a wet winter, we took on a derelict 17th century farmhouse standing in a sea of mud, with various decrepit stone outbuildings and battered tin barns clanking in the wind. At first it was hard to take in the beauty of the place, so distracted were we by the buildings, and by the collapsing state of almost every hedge, fence and gate on the farm.

We discovered that the farm was full of lovely things: undulating fields, sheltered by woodland, crossed by several small streams flowing into the Wachan Brook, our southern boundary. And best of all, it had not been intensively farmed by our predecessors. Steep banks had not been ploughed for 50 years and were covered in ant-hills. Wild flowers were everywhere, none particularly rare, but in numbers we were not used to seeing on other farmed grassland.



Southern Marsh and Common Spotted-orchids in the hay meadow (Teona Dorrien-Smith)

I started to look for grants for wildlife and woodlands because we love and wanted to increase the variety of the native plants, birds and insects. To my delight, we qualified for both Forestry Commission aid and the Welsh

Tir Gofal whole farm management grant scheme. We started conversion to organic at about the same time, becoming officially organic in July 2001, in the middle of the Foot-and-mouth crisis.



Waxcap fungi in the permanent pasture (Teona Dorrien-Smith)

The Farm Woodlands grant scheme helped us fence off about five acres of old woods, to allow natural regeneration, and to plant another five acres of new broadleaved woodland. Primroses *Primula vulgaris*, Wood Anemones *Anemone nemerosa*, Cowslips, Wild Strawberries *Fragaria vesca*, Wood Sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, Early-purple Orchids *Orchis mascula* and Greater Butterfly-orchids, and at least 60 other flowers, rushes and grasses are flourishing in the rides and clearings.

Ten years of Tir Gofal grants have allowed us to do nearly all the work that would otherwise have taken us over 20 years. 3.5 km of hedges have been laid or replanted, four streamside corridors fenced; an arable

rotation, with winter stubble, is in its twelfth year; about 52 acres are permanent semi-improved pasture, half managed as traditional hay-meadows. The MMG and Gwent Wildlife Trust surveyed these fields and all are now registered as Local Wildlife Sites, and in the last few years orchids and Hay-rattle have



Hay meadow flowers (Teona Dorrien-Smith)

appeared in most of them. Patches of Spiny Restharrow *Ononis spinosa* and Burnet Saxifrage grow on the banks, and fallow strips in the arable fields produce a fascinating variety of plants from the dormant seed bank.

Until recently, it was rare to go out without meeting a Hare. Butterfly, bat and breeding bird numbers were steadily increasing. Hornets, bumblebees, moths and dragonflies were everywhere. The list is long, and it is gratifying to have done all this in such a short time, but the truth is that the recent change in the weather has undone much of the good. The constant cold and wet means the soil is saturated, fewer insects, bats, frogs and toads

are about, and fewer breeding birds. If the change turns out to be permanent, much more must be done to adapt and to maintain what there is, let alone reverse the losses.

Managing old meadows does not have to be labour intensive, and the results, even in wet summers, can be a delight, with the big plus that CO₂ is locked up in the soil of permanent pasture, and the deep root systems help the soil to drain. This helps the microbial life in the soils, which in turn support the fungi, plants and invertebrates on which we all depend. Even the most 'improved' or neglected land can slowly be returned to a flower-rich meadow over time. We were lucky to start with relatively unspoilt fields, but with help and advice from the volunteers and botanists of the MMG, much more is possible than you'd ever expect. We desperately need to bring back the lost ecosystems which are disappearing or being depleted all over the country.

Upper Red House Farm:

www.upperredhouse.co.uk



*Hay meadow behind beautiful, invasive and poisonous Hemlock Water Dropwort *Oenanthe crocata* (Teona Dorrien-Smith)*

Little Mill Farm

Ann Eggleton

In the 1980s, my husband Michael and I decided we had had enough of the three hours daily commute to London, and wanted to have a crack at producing our own food. So, in April 1989, we sold up and bought a tiny farm just north of Monmouth: Little Mill Farm at Newcastle.

In August 1989 we became the first Soil Association registered organic farm in Gwent. An expert came to advise us and told us to plough up the whole farm in sequence and reseed with more productive grasses. After he left, Michael and I looked at each other, and decided to ignore him. We wanted to see what we really had, before rejecting it. As time went on we discovered that the farm was nearly untouched by modern chemicals. Across woods, hedgerows and fields, we had almost 200 species of wildflowers, some of them rare, and Dormice. And one day a farming neighbour told us that some of our fields had made lovely hay, 'full of flowers'.

From then on we cut those fields every year, and gave them only small amounts of manure. They made wonderful hay full of scented grasses, and over the years the flowers gradually built up. They were mostly different clovers, vetches and trefoils, as well as Moon Daisies or Ox-eye Daisies and Selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, but there were also

scattered patches of Naked Ladies or Meadow Saffron *Colchicum autumnale*, a local speciality, now rare. These are very slow to spread, but they are increasing here.

The farm flourished for many years until farming enterprises had to be reduced due to Michael's poor health and the consequent struggle to maintain the farm. However, over time, I have found new energy and enthusiasm. I joined the committee of the MMG, and I also joined Transition Monmouth. Here were issues I could identify with, and which matched in every way what I found I wanted to do on the farm. Michael and I had never aimed at self-sufficiency but with 'climate chaos' and 'peak oil' on a very near horizon there is clearly an urgent need to change life-styles to be more basic, local, nearer the soil, and, frankly, far more enjoyable. For the future, the farm will become more and more locally sustainable. For instance, the animals are fed locally-grown field beans rather than 'planet-destroying' soya. The pigs will plough and fertilize a rotation of paddocks to grow feed for the sheep, a house-cow, and for themselves. And my precious self-sustaining hay meadows will be at the heart of the farm, as they always were in the past.



Little Mill Farm: hay meadows behind and to the left of the farm house (Ann Eggleton)

Members' Stories: Smaller Acreage

Kinsons Farm Meadow, Whitebrook

Sarah Cheese

In 2009 we purchased this 2.5 acre meadow as a family project, with a view to managing it as a wildlife site, growing a few trees for green woodwork, and as an outdoor classroom for our two home-educated children.



MMG work party at Kinsons Farm (Stephanie Tyler)

It faces north and is surrounded on three sides by woodland, with the Whitebrook lane running along the south side. In winter, it is in total shade. Summertime brings some sun, especially along the southern edge; many woodland plants such as Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* seem to thrive here. It has been a Local Wildlife Site since 2005.

Initially, it was very overgrown with brambles and Bracken outcompeting most of the meadow plants; we could not even walk around it. There was a small area towards the bottom with some surviving meadow plants, including Common Spotted-orchids. I decided to try and restore the central part of the land to wildflower meadow habitat. Being a novice at meadow management, I joined MMG and have found this an invaluable source of advice and encouragement. I set about

clearing the brambles using hand tools such as slashers and loppers. It has taken a couple of years to clear most of them. I naively thought that meadow plants would magically appear in their place, but I was surprised to see a forest of Common Hemp-nettle *Galeopsis tetrahit* spring up instead. These have been succeeded by some rather invasive Yorkshire Fog, which seems to spread at an alarming rate. I have been trying to manage the grassland by scything by hand with an Austrian scythe and raking the grass into heaps, and have also borrowed the MMG ponies to graze it down later in the year. It does now resemble a meadow, although with rather dense growth, and we can now walk around it.

We have been delighted to find that, despite being rather cold, it is a surprisingly good place for reptiles.

We placed a couple of pieces of corrugated iron and carpet next to our grass



Meadow after the hard work (Sarah Cheese)

compost heaps at the south of the meadow by the hedge so that we could survey the numbers of Slow Worms and Grass Snakes that take refuge under them. We have seen several



Grass Snake and Slow Worm at Kinsons Farm (Sarah Cheese)

young Grass Snakes in 2011 and 2012 so we believe that the snakes have been laying eggs in the compost heaps. The snakes and Slow Worms seem to co-habit quite happily and we often see several individuals from each species intertwined under the corrugated iron or carpet. There are also Common Lizards breeding on the site.

From May to the end of August, I spend quite a lot of time waging war against the Bracken which grows on about three quarters

of the meadow. Where it grows amongst the meadow plants, I walk about pulling it every two to three weeks. This seems to be weakening it and happily I am starting to notice that it grows less tall and vigorous than it did. In other areas where it grows with bramble or docks I just scythe it down frequently. The Yorkshire Fog is proving to be more of a problem. At the moment I am trying to scythe the worst patches before it makes seed, and pull it to try and avoid it spreading. I am also grazing with the ponies to reduce the coarse grasses. The meadow management has turned out to be physically very hard work but I have also found it a wonderful opportunity to experience a habitat closely through the seasons and to develop a unique relationship with the land. I find it strangely addictive and enjoyable despite getting scratched by brambles, bitten by flies, soaked by sweat and rain, and generally exhausted. I have a few weeks off in winter and cannot wait to see what pops out of the earth every spring and to count the snakes again in summer. Winter is a time to get your own back on the brambles and reduce them to size while they are defenceless.

Far Barn Hay Meadow

Glynis Laws

We moved to this converted barn in the Monnow valley in January 2002. It is approached by a long track through a field that is thought unlikely to have been ploughed for decades. We bought a sit-on lawnmower from the previous owners and, like them, continued to mulch-mow the field. Ever-increasing fertility meant that the grass required more frequent mowing and, when the field was too wet to mow, we worried that the grass would grow beyond the mower's capability.

We were saved from all this when Rebecca Price from Gwent Wildlife Trust came to survey a nearby field in August 2006 and stayed to survey ours. Rebecca found that we already had many meadow species, including

the relatively uncommon Pepper Saxifrage. She suggested we start by cutting and raking up the grass in the autumn and see what grew the following year. She put us in touch with Stephanie Tyler and we joined MMG.

We let the meadow grow, and cut paths around the edges and snaking pathways through the middle, using a tractor and mower that will collect the cuttings and avoid the problems of increasing fertility. From year one, the meadow was full of life and colour. The paths are visually appealing and make a walk through the meadow enjoyable. The mown pathway by the hedge prevents encroachment by nettles and brambles. The farmer who grazes his sheep on our two pasture fields from May to November cuts the

meadow in return for the hay, and he is happy to cut late enough to allow most plants to shed seed.



White Clover dominates where the grass is still regularly mown as 'lawn' (Glynis Laws)

The diversity of meadow species has increased year on year. Even when the grass was mowed short, Rebecca identified 39 species but the following spring, when the meadow was growing, Steph Tyler listed 65 herbs, eight grasses and four sedges and rushes, including 11 indicator species. By 2011, there were 16 indicator species and the meadow was listed as a Local Wildlife Site.

In 2012, with Steph's support, especially with the grasses, I developed my own plant identification skills. Regular surveys throughout the year extended the species list to 104 herbs, 17 grasses, and seven sedges or rushes, including 35 indicator species. In spring, Cowslips and Lady's-smock or Cuckooflower provide



Devil's-bit Scabious (Glynis Laws)

interest, the latter imparting a pink haze to the meadow. As the year wears on, the deep pink of Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* is followed by the orange-red of Common Sorrel, and then Red Fescue. Later, there is the creamy-white of Meadowsweet.

I had no expectation of orchids but, in 2012, Broad-leaved Helleborines *Epipactis helleborine* appeared with spikes of beautiful greenish flowers, tinged maroon. They flowered rather late so had to be protected from the mower and strimmed off later. Some other late bloomers, like Devil's-bit Scabious, could do with the same treatment. The meadow offers a variety of conditions, each with characteristic species. A permanently wet area includes Alternate-leaved Golden Saxifrage *Chrysosplenium alternifolium*, Creeping Jenny *Lysimachia nummularia*, Wood Pimpernel, and Wild Angelica. Elsewhere, a ditch that



The same field managed as wildflower meadow (Glynis Laws)

takes water off during heavy rain is rich with flowers, including the Pepper Saxifrage, Common Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*, and Bog Stitchwort.

The field edge includes some woodland species, such as Town-hall Clock *Adoxa moschatellina* but can be rank with nettles, bramble and Hogweed. These are the food plants of many insects, so not all bad news, but some sections are strimmed and raked off each autumn. The problem of overdominant

grasses in a small area of the field is being dealt with by sowing Hay-rattle and by cutting the flowering heads off Timothy Grass *Phleum pratense* to prevent it seeding.

Problems are far out-weighed by the pleasure that the meadow gives, not just for its flowers but for the butterflies, moths and other

insects it attracts, which in turn attract many birds. We have always had Swallows nesting and enjoy watching them swoop low over the meadow to feed. We've had House Martins for three years and, in 2012, Redstarts nested in the shed. Restoring this meadow has to be the best thing we have done for wildlife.

The Story of Northridge Meadows

Ann Robinson

When they were young our children greatly enjoyed wandering through the meadows opposite our house. When in 2000 these meadows became available for purchase we felt impelled to buy them. This set us a major challenge: what to do with our newly acquired land? Rather idealistically we decided to try to turn it into a species-rich wildlife preserve combining wildflower meadows with native woodland.

With a grant from the Forestry Commission, about half of the land was planted with native trees. In the following twelve years or so we also planted about 60 exotic trees to add interest while walking around the site. Unfortunately not all of the trees have survived. Many of the original plantings of whips failed and we have planted

another 600 or so as replacements. A considerable number of trees have been subject to severe squirrel damage and others have been flooded to death in the lower (very marshy) field. Nevertheless, the planted areas now look like woodland and two years ago we began the process of thinning the original planting.

The first summer, a farmer turned up and said he would cut and take the hay. This arrangement continued for about seven years until he found the yield had fallen, and his nerve was no longer up to driving a tractor on our very steep slopes. Since then we have used a contractor (who also performs the vital task of chain harrowing in the spring to flatten the molehills) and have been lucky enough to have a purchaser for the hay who removes it from



Lady's-smock in the lower meadow (Ann Robinson)



Marbled White (Ray Armstrong)

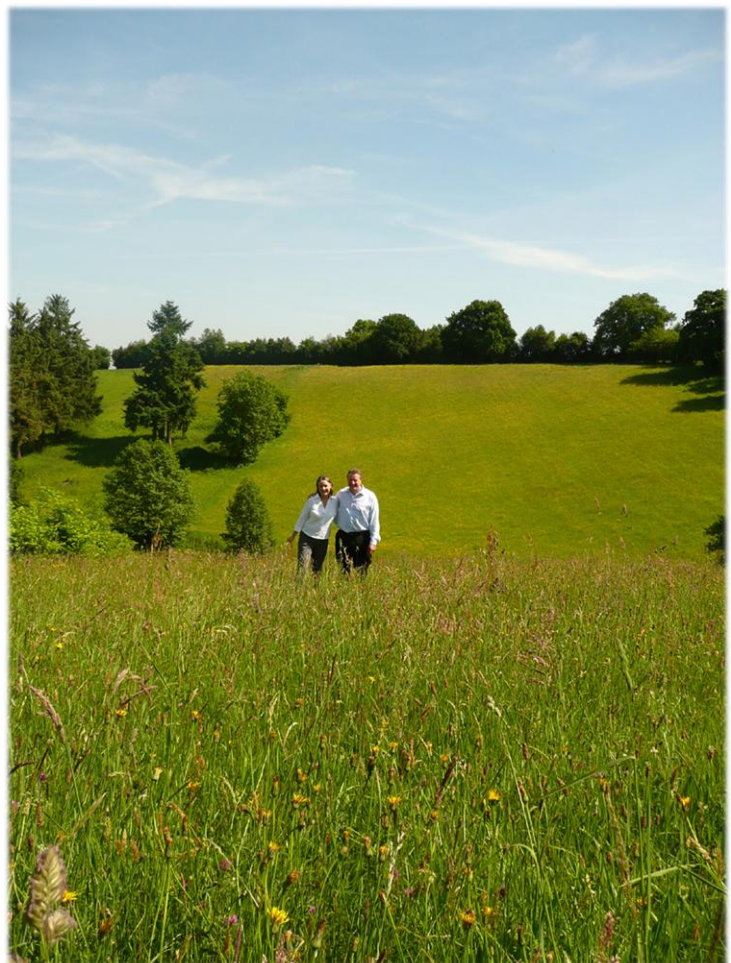
the field. The past four or so years have been very difficult for haymaking as the weather has been so wet. The contractor has appeared at the very end of August and by then drying the hay becomes more difficult. Haymaking in 2012 was particularly difficult as the ground was so sodden that the hay had to be turned six times before it could be baled.

The site was surveyed by Dr. Stephanie Tyler in May 2005 when over 70 species of grasses, rushes and other flowering plants were recorded. The site was identified as a Local Wildlife Site in November 2006. We have not had a recent survey but two years ago it was considered species rich enough to attract the attention of a commercial seed merchant. Seed was harvested from the fields by PlantWild, and that year we more or less broke even on the haymaking costs.

The effect of an annual cut and removal of hay has been remarkable, as has been the effect of everlasting bramble bashing and manual control of Bracken. We have not used herbicides but pure brute strength. When we arrived the brambles stretched out at least a dozen feet from the (invisible) hedge. Hedges were also in a terribly neglected condition and we have worked hard over the years to restore them, even those that are not strictly part of our territory (some farmers take no action and seem to think that a twelve foot or higher barrier of brambles is stock proof).

The meadows themselves had not been cut for some years prior to 2001 and were reverting to brush - even now we find oak seedlings here and there. If left in this state they would by now be on the way to becoming rough woodland. But because of our work we now see Lady's-smock flourishing in great swathes in the lower, wetter meadow, and Bluebells emerging in the newly planted woodland in the upper part of the upper meadow. Great swathes of Ox-eye Daisies dot the upper meadow, and other surprises are the Cowslips and, to our great joy, after about six years, Common Spotted-orchids, varied in colour from almost white to dark pink.

During drier summers we have had some marvellous populations of butterflies, particularly clouds of Marbled Whites, but because the last three summers have been so wet, butterflies have been few. The site teems with Rabbits, Badgers, possibly the occasional



Open day at Northridge: contrast the diversity in the meadow with the 'improved' grassland behind (Ann Robinson)

deer to damage trees, squirrels and birds, including a number of interesting birds of prey.

We have learned a lot over the past decade and believe that we are not just creating an attractive hay meadow but also providing a rich and varied environment for all types of wildlife.

On Coming to The Narth – 1969 to 1999

Ida Dunn

I shall never forget how I felt on coming to The Narth. The village was so unspoilt, though very scattered. We had no idea that there were so many old stone cottages tucked away along the narrow lanes coming off the 'main' road. There were wonderful walks to discover – the Bluebell woods, the lanes bordering fields full of Primroses that put me back into the Middle Ages with its three-field

under the strict supervision of my husband Philip, of course.

In 1978, when some fields in Maryland were advertised in the Monmouth Beacon, Philip and I were very interested. There was a most romantic ruin in the middle of the fields. Just fancy! Living in the middle of a field! Mr Watkins, the old owner, had died intestate and had no family apparently. He



Ida in her hay meadow (Margaret Biss)

system, and the steep, narrow Whitebrook road going down to the Wye, decorated in early Spring by myriads of Snowdrops *Galanthus nivalis* each side of the stream. From the Beacon could be seen the steep spire of Trellech church.

There was the little Narth School over the road, run by Mrs Barrett and Miss Theobald. We made friends with many of the children there – they came and took pleasure in helping with the garden we were creating, and the boys loved to get on the ride-on mower,

must have been such an interesting, stubborn, independent old character, who lived in the barn when the cottage became ruined and roofless. The old man had barricaded his side of the road opposite the Chapel with barbed wire to protect his privacy from parked cars of people going to the Chapel. It was quite a job to clear but I could not help feeling sorry for this old man, all alone, when I found bits of his old iron bedstead and leather shoes and implements around the place. There are two big fields divided by the 'old man's garden', as

I call it, and a half acre of woodland, with the whole area on the east side bordering the forest. The two fields are ancient unploughed hay fields, so have abundant wild flowers including a now-getting-rare species of orchid, the small Wild Daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*, and Bluebells in the half acre woodland that leads down to a stream fed



*Butterfly-orchid (taken at Pentwyn Farm)
(Keith Moseley)*

by risings in the next field that join the Manor Brook that goes into the Wye.

Philip died in 1992, and it was quite some time after when I decided to try to repair this little smallholding, with the aid of the local builder, Mr Boycott, who is also a neighbour and lives in Maryland. There is still a great deal of work to be done, and if I can cope with the beautiful deer that enter from the forest and eat shoots off the apple trees I have planted in the 'old man's garden', the Moles that have homed in, and the Rabbits that have nibbled away all the plants in the rockery made from the huge ice-age stones that Mr Boycott found under the cowshed, I shall be happy. Yes, there is much work to be

done, but days in this clear air, with the sun in the spring catching the white blossom of an old, magnificent, tall pear tree - my Prince of Pear Trees - and one moonlit night with its canopy of bright stars, are recompense.

I hope to be in Maryland for the Millennium!

Postscript by Stephanie Tyler, 2013

It was marvellous that Ida was in her lovely home at Four Acres in Maryland for the Millennium.

Ida had attended the MMG inaugural meeting in Trellech and told us of her interesting meadows. When we visited, we were amazed at how species-rich the meadows were, and at the wonderful numbers of Greater Butterfly-orchids. In fact, it proved to be the largest known population of this scarce orchid in Monmouthshire. Ida also mentioned having seen Pink Waxcaps *Hygrocybe calyptriformis* and, sure enough, one year there they were.

Ida always welcomed members of MMG at her house and fields and enjoyed showing people what she had created, including the stone annexe with all her home-made wine! On several Open Days her fields were visited by members, and she hosted the get-together with a former Welsh Environment Minister when Diana Bevan accepted an Environment Award on behalf of MMG.

Right up to her 98th year, Ida was making plans for repairing stone walls around her property. Sadly, she then suffered a stroke and moved to a home near Birmingham where she celebrated her 100th birthday in 2012.

Happily, Nikki Godfrey and family, who now live in Ida's house, are very sympathetic towards meadow management and, in 2013, Nikki assures me that they will be leaving the lawn at the front of the house to grow as a meadow. It will be exciting to see what comes up in the new meadow and to count the Greater Butterfly-orchids in the established hay meadows again. In 2012, one Green-winged Orchid appeared in grassland at the back of the house. Ida would have been delighted with this addition to the plant list.

Stevenstone Meadow, Lydart

Barbara Newby

We moved here at Easter 1997 and I have an enduring memory of sitting among the wildflowers in our field admiring the beauty of the field, the view and the sense of peace.

Our field, although small, is part of an ancient system, never having been ploughed or had pesticides applied. Most years we have had the hay cut and baled around mid-summer. In 2012, it was too wet to cut so we experienced the delight of grazing sheep in the autumn. With the help of the MMG, the hedges have also now been returned to the laid system. The advice and information provided has been invaluable to us in trying to manage the field sensitively and with a light touch.

All the hard work has been rewarded with a profusion of Primroses, Common Dog-violets, Common Spotted-orchids, and other wildflowers too many to mention, finishing with Meadow Saffron, and the pretty, fruiting Spindle *Euonymus europaea* bushes in the

hedge. We have all these and the knowledge of retaining a unique Monmouth heritage.



Meadow Saffron (Naked Ladies) in the Newby's field (Margaret Biss)

Manorside, The Narth

Vera Easton

In 1988, Geoffrey and I tired of the declining quality of life in London and decided to retire to the Wye Valley. We were both keen gardeners and interested in wildlife and the natural world. We ended up at Manorside, a wooded area between The Narth and Pen-y-Fan, well off-road and, at about two acres in all, has rather more land than we had intended. It is bounded on the west and south by Forestry Commission planting, on the east by our own mature Beech and Sycamore trees and a neighbour's paddock, and on the north by a screen of conifers.

Apart from around the house where we have made a garden, the property consists of two small paddocks. The previous owners had grazed two horses on the larger, bottom paddock which had a small area with fruit trees railed off for protection. This paddock can be quite damp and was poached up when

we took it over in the winter. The other, top paddock was home to two goats. A neighbour told us there were Bluebells and a few orchids so it was a matter of 'wait and see' and get advice. Early on we were much indebted to Elsa and Adrian Wood who advised that to restore the paddocks we should mow them annually in July/August and have the grass taken away. They were most interested in the small railed-off area, which we call the Little Orchard, which had never been grazed. We were intrigued to find they were more interested in the variety of grasses there than in the flowers.

We followed their advice and surprisingly soon the land began to reveal its treasures. We begin with the lovely white Wood Anemones and as they fade the Bluebells are a haze of blue. Then follow the Cowslips, which normally coincide with the

Green-winged Orchids, Bugle *Ajuga reptans* and Common Dog-violets *Viola riviniana*, followed by Twayblades and patches of Lousewort and blue and white Common Milkwort. Next come the Common Spotted-orchids, too numerous to count, which bloom over a long period in shades varying from pink to white. These meld into the rich tapestry of high-summer ancient hay-meadow flora at their best in June. Ox-eye Daisies, Common Cat's-ear, Yellow-rattle, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Selfheal, Pignut, and Meadow Vetchling all stand out. The display ends with Common Knapweed, which has increased over the years rather more than we like. The meadows attract many butterflies and moths.

For many years, a contractor has cut and carted away the hay. Timing is always

problematical since we have to fit in with his other, larger work and rain can hold things up badly. After mowing, Geoffrey usually goes round on the Westwood to tidy up bits left over. Then until late autumn it is the time for fungi. There are usually many different kinds including different coloured Waxcaps but we are pretty ignorant about them.

You may think that I have painted a picture of paradise and, indeed, it is paradise to us but, as always, there are serpents in our Garden of Eden and I don't mean the Grass Snakes we occasionally encounter. We have not been without problems and, sadly, these seem to have increased. There is the loss of sunlight from the forest trees and increasing rain. We have to be vigilant with Bracken, which tries to creep in from the boundaries,



Yellow-rattle, Selfheal and Common Spotted-orchid in Manorside meadow (Margaret Biss)



Orchids migrating to a damp niche by the garden pond (Margaret Biss)

and I pounce on the few docks before they can seed. Ever-increasing browsing by deer and an increased Rabbit population also cause problems.

For some time, our greatest concern was the apparent diminution of the rare Green-winged Orchids. From an initial count of five we got up to 77 in 1999. But from 2003 the numbers began to diminish yearly until we saw only two. The good news is that in 2012 they were back with numbers in the high teens. Devil's-bit Scabious, a new arrival, is increasing in the Little Orchard and the Common Spotted-orchids and Twayblades have enjoyed the rain and become even more plentiful.



*Twayblade (taken at Tymawr Convent)
(Keith Moseley)*

Hay Rattle and Roll - Bringing Life to a Green Desert *Jeremy Harris & Clare Adamson*

It was love at first sight: a derelict 17th century stone barn nestling by a sunken farm track. Situated in a tranquil corner of Herefordshire, on the English/Welsh border and 140m (460') above sea level, it had stunning views to the Skyrrid, The Sugarloaf and the Black Mountains. We bought this small threshing barn with 1.5 acres from Cwm Maddoc Farm in 1994 and called it Hollow Ash after the veteran tree in the adjacent hedgerow. Up until the 1960s this had been one of the largest farms in the parish but was now reduced to 60 acres of arable and grazing land, supporting cattle and sheep. It was farmed conventionally, with annual applications of fertilizer, and most of the grassland was included in a rotation, meaning it was regularly ploughed.

We soon realised that, despite the appearance of rural idyll, botanically there was little of interest, the grass being predominantly Rye-grass. In the hedgerows were remnants of Bluebells, Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis*, and Common Dog-violets. On the neighbouring smallholding,



The Barn (Jeremy Harris)

with permanent pasture and hay meadows, the spring and summer display was fantastic and inspired us to try to produce something similar.

The area in front of the barn was ideal for establishing a wildflower patch. We levelled, raked and seeded it with wildflower seed from Landlife, then rolled it, and were delighted when a thick mass of wildflowers and grasses sprang up. In the first few years it was dominated by Yellow-rattle and Ox-eye Daisies, but gradually a more balanced flora developed, including Common Knapweed, Lady's Bedstraw, Field Scabious, Red Clover and many others. After several years we were rewarded with Common Spotted-orchids. This little patch, although small, gives us great

pleasure, and supports a great host of insects and birds.

In 2007 we were able to buy a further 6.5 acres of adjoining land, which had a similar management history. At that time, we joined the MMG. Stephanie came out and confirmed our suspicion that we had very little species diversity. We had plenty of Rye-grass, nettles, docks and Creeping Thistles *Cirsium arvense*, indicators of a high-nitrogen regime. Four acres were planted as a coppice wood and the remainder was planted as traditional orchards with grazing under standard fruit trees.

In the grassland, we undertook a management strategy to reduce the fertility over time, by removing a silage or hay crop



Buttercup meadow (with 'improved' grassland behind) (Jeremy Harris)



Our wildflower patch (Jeremy Harris)

each year, and tried to introduce new species by scattering seed from the MMG, or green hay from our wildflower patch. We also removed the turf and top four inches of soil from two trial patches; one we sowed with seed from the MMG, and the other we left to colonise itself. There appears to be an increase in the variety of fine grasses and other species, but the cost and effort involved ruled out replicating this on a larger scale.

In the young woodland, after six years, there is a scattering of native Wild Daffodils, Snowdrops and Bluebells, all resulting from planting or seeding. Flowers are moving in from the hedgerow, such as Dog's Mercury, Greater Stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*, Foxgloves *Digitalis purpurea* and Great Mullein *Verbascum thapsus*. In the orchards, patches of Yellow-rattle have appeared. Across all our land, the list of herbaceous flowers numbers over 50 species, including the problem plants such as Creeping Thistle and Field Bindweed *Convolvulus arvensis*. However we have a long way to go before we replicate the flower-rich meadows and orchards that must have existed here when the first map of the property was made in 1698.

Hollow Ash: www.hollow-ash.co.uk



Ringlet on Red Clover (Jeremy Harris)



Comma (Jeremy Harris)



Haymaking at Hollow Ash (Jeremy Harris)

Members' Stories: Community Projects

Shirenewton & Mynyddbach Fields Association

Alison Broughton

The Shirenewton and Mynyddbach Fields Association Limited (SAMFAL) was formed in November 2006 to protect and enhance the biodiversity and special ecological value of an area known locally as the 'Green Wedge', which separates the two villages.

With the help of grants from the National Lottery and Biffaward we purchased 11 acres (approximately half the green wedge

maintenance of the fields and our members are invited to join work parties several times a year as we continue to fight the more invasive species whilst encouraging other more attractive species to flourish. To date we have reclaimed two distinct meadow areas, which cover more than half of the overall area, created a large wildlife pond, planted new mixed hedges along parts of our north and eastern boundaries, cleared some of the Alder, planted new willow trees and erected bird boxes built for us by the local Girl Guides.

Each year we are seeing more flowers returning, with orchids spreading once more across several areas of the fields. On her last visit, Steph Tyler identified almost 100 different species growing across the fields.



Bramble city! Before the clearance (Alison Broughton)

area) in 2009. Although the land had once been grazed by cattle, it had been neglected and not actively farmed for more than eight years, leaving it overgrown with brambles, Bracken, Himalayan Balsam, Ragwort and seedling trees not to mention rubbish from fly-tipping, teenage parties and local gardens. We obtained further funding from the Countryside Council for Wales and Monmouthshire Tidy Towns to enable us to remove the rubbish, cut back the brambles and fence the perimeter to create two separate fields with plenty of gates making the fields easily accessible to the local community.

We have a membership scheme to support the on-going



Bramble munching with MMG Tracmaster (Alison Broughton)



After clearance (Alison Broughton)

The area is very diverse with mature oak trees, alder copses and a small stream running through the middle of it. There are some very boggy areas which make access to some parts of the fields by tractor very difficult and, during 2012, quite impossible. However

with help from MMG the areas we are unable to cut have been grazed through recent winters, initially by Exmoor ponies, and more recently by several Welsh Mountain ponies.

The fields back onto the local primary school grounds and we have worked with the school and Gwent Wildlife Trust to provide access to the fields for activities that form part of the environmental curriculum, including bird watching and ringing, treasure hunts, and hosting visits from inner city schools. To enable the school to

make more use of the area we have built a log circle, which they use as an outdoor classroom.

SAMFAL: www.shirenewtonfields.org.uk



View of the SAMFAL site with stream in the centre (Alison Broughton)

Members' Stories: Gardens

The Brooks *Marion Stainton*

The garden at 'The Brooks' is open for the National Gardens Scheme twice a year, so the wild areas need to 'fit' with this theme. There are three designated wildflower

area is under a small orchard, probably about a quarter acre, which is full of Lady's-smock, Cowslips, Primroses and Crocuses. The third area is in its third year – about half an acre of



The Brooks (David and Margaret Rose)

meadow areas in the garden, all in their infancy as far as being managed for their wild flora. The oldest and best established is on the banks of a ditch that runs down the centre of the garden, past our natural pond. The second

semi-improved grassland, which we hope will continue to improve in diversity.

To me these areas are important, not just because they provide a wonderful contrast with the ornamental areas (that is the plants

I have placed in the garden) but because they contribute to the wealth and balance of wildlife in the garden. Since I do not use pesticides, I need wildlife to be in balance and busy in order to avoid damaging outbreaks of pests on my garden plants. The benefit is not just to me and my chosen plants, but to the other species in the garden and to the wider environment of which we are a small part. We have



Path cleared through the meadow (Marion Stainton)

seen a marked increase in birds visiting. There are frogs, toads and newts in our pond, and a resident Hedgehog too. There are usually lots of bees, butterflies and other insects. The garden fair hums with life on a sunny day, which is music to the ears of anyone who cares about the environment. I

also like to think that our 2.5 acre garden provides wildlife services to the surrounding farmland – an oasis of variety in contrast to those patches of monoculture.

Marion Stainton:

www.marionet.co.uk/the_brooks

Discovering the Meadow in your Garden

Gilly Pollock

Many of us long to have a wildflower meadow in our garden to attract wildlife and to provide a softer, natural contrast to more formal garden areas. If this is something that appeals to you, before you rush outside to scarify the lawn and start sowing a meadow mix, perhaps you just need to find out what you already have growing in your lawn.

When we moved to a village in the rolling Monmouthshire hills, we inherited half an acre of hillside garden. The land is split into three areas, each with unique characteristics. Two lawns are typical of a domestic garden but the third is a bit different, situated on a steep bank, covered with a carpet of moss. Many gardeners would have reached for the rake and moss killer, but I quite like a mossy lawn as it is lovely to walk on bare footed in the summer, so we left it au naturel.

This mossy lawn provided a wonderful spring display of Primroses and Cowslips but, once the grass started to grow, my husband would be out with the lawnmower. One year however, I persuaded him to leave the lawn uncut to see what else was growing there. This decision has been one of the best I have ever made in many years of gardening.

A succession of flowers grew, including Lady's-smock, Bluebells, Germander Speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*, Pignut, Bugle, Common Sorrel, Red Clover and, in early June, Common Spotted-orchids. I was so excited that every morning I went out with a cup of tea, counting the orchids and observing the area for new flowers and grasses.

Stephanie Tyler came to carry out a survey. Much to my surprise, the survey showed that we have a small area of

unimproved grassland with over 50 species of flowers and grasses. It has more than eight of the indicator plants required to designate a Local Wildlife Site. The highlight was the discovery of a Broad-leaved Helleborine, not the most attractive plant but one that is highly regarded by botanists. Each year the meadow becomes more colourful and the number of orchids has almost doubled to 19 plants.

One side of the meadow is in partial shade, under the canopy of an oak tree, whilst the other side is in full sun, providing conditions for a diverse range of species. We cut a twisting path through the meadow, which leads through the swathes of grasses



Oak House garden meadow (David Pollock)



*Common Spotted-orchid at Oak House
(David Pollock)*

and bobbing flower heads. I love to sit and watch the gentle breeze and the sunlight dancing on the flower heads and elegant grasses.

Since the discovery of our own natural meadow, my knowledge has increased and I now find this the most satisfying area of the garden. Watching a variety of bees, butterflies, hoverflies, ladybirds and a range of moths and other insects makes it very worthwhile. The protection of small areas of meadows is important to provide wildflower corridors for all insects but especially bees. Monmouthshire is home to several bee species, including the rare Shrill Carder Bee, so I feel that I am



*Broad-leaved Helleborines in
mini-meadow in Nigel & Jane
Seabourne's garden, close to Oak
House (Stephanie Tyler)*

helping to support the local bee population. Leaving the meadow uncut until mid-September allows time for the bees to breed. By this time the meadow looks pretty tired and messy, but we leave it until the seeds have set and the bees have dined on their last supper.

My advice is to let your lawn grow for one season, cut a path to provide a natural river flowing through it and just wait – you too may have a natural meadow hidden in the soil just waiting to burst out in your garden.

Gilly Pollock:

www.britishplantnurseryguide.co.uk

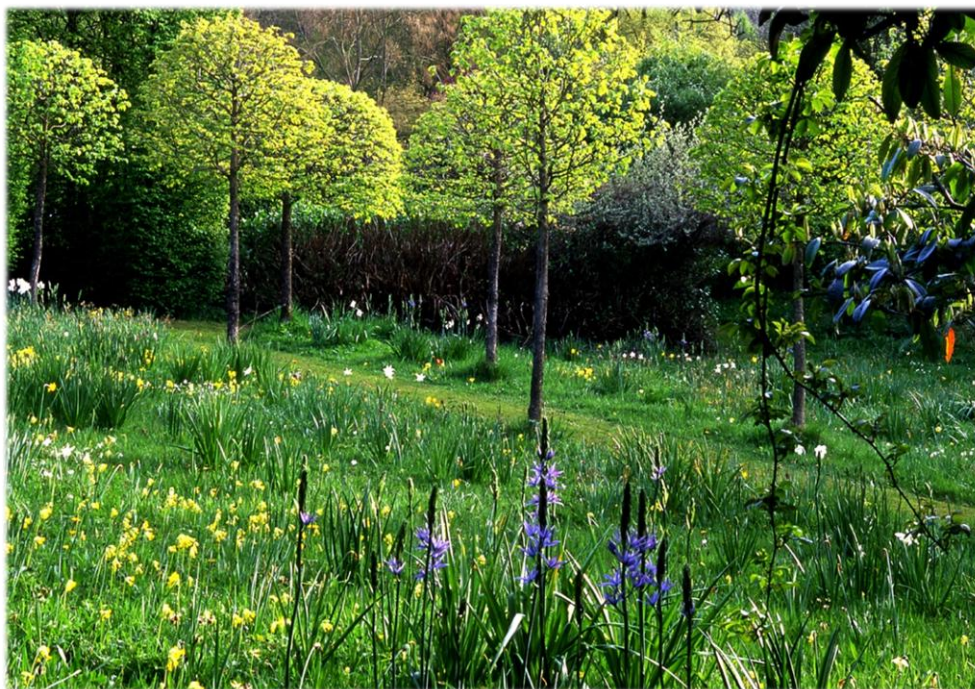
Veddw

Anne Wareham

I have a great interest in and respect for the history of the land at Veddw, which for the last couple of hundred years appears to have been used as a smallholding, with the fields used principally for grazing. But, we did come here to make a garden, so it became necessary to find ways to incorporate old pasture into garden.

The ornamental garden at Veddw is about two acres, divided up into many separate areas. And a garden as full and as floriferous as this also needs some quiet, unfussy spaces, so some of the meadow has been kept to fulfil that function. Apart from in the spring, when we have succumbed to the

That is not the only faffing about that we have done in order to keep as much as possible of the original sward (there's a wonderful word). When people talk about turning parts of their garden to meadow they often suggest letting the lawn grow out. The problem with this can be that a lawn has in some ways a different function – a place to lounge around on, picnic or play on; not so easy in long grass. It is maybe better to think of a meadow as a special kind of border, and if you are not going to be purist about avoiding adding new elements and plants, this works well. I like the idea of 'framing' a piece of meadow, rather as if it is being preserved as an art work on display, raising consciousness



The meadow at Veddw (Charles Hawes)

delight of adding multitudes of small bulbs to complement the Cowslips, Wood Anemones and Bluebells, which now yearly show their approval by multiplying (mostly – endless rain is clearly a challenge). Some of the bulbs – Snakeshead Fritillaries *Fritillaria meleagris* and small Daffodils *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* and *N. pseudonarcissus ssp. obvallaris* – may be British natives, so they look congruent and that matters.

about the subdued and delicate beauty that fine grasses and our modest wild flowers can offer.

So in part of the garden I planted robust perennials directly into the grass, giving just enough added flower power to make it clear that the area is deliberate and gardened. Day Lilies and Campanula are delightful in this context; Crocosmias love it and mix very well with the wild look. The 'frame' of a semi-

circular path around it adds emphasis to the border-not-wasteland idea. The maintenance of this area has been confusing though.

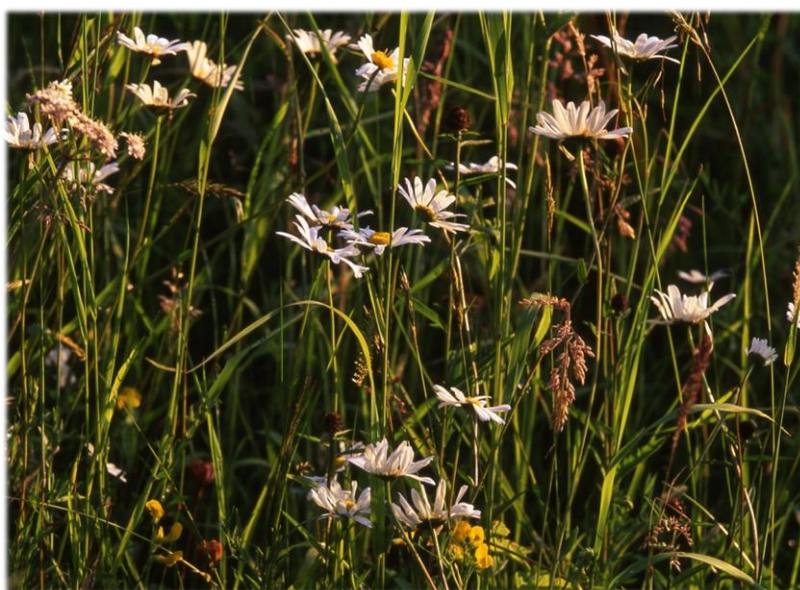
In the other, more conventional meadow areas, which had become over-rich from grazing, we initially had to use an Allen Scythe – a motorised scythe on wheels. A trimmer might have done in a smaller area. This regime involved raking the mowings off and then using them as wonderfully useful mulch elsewhere in the garden. Then after a few years the grasses became fine enough for us to mow with the ride-on mower; no more raking and the mower carries the mulch wherever we need it. Life has got easier.

But the area where I also grow perennials puzzled me as the perennials need more fertility than native meadow plants and grasses. So the regime there has been fitful and confused, but the area still seems to thrive and work. Sometimes it is raked off, sometimes left to lie. Common Spotted-orchids and Ragged Robin have appeared there so perhaps the message is that we don't need to be too rigid in our regimes if we get it basically right? Which is a great consolation in years when it rains so continuously that it seems that mowing will be impossible.

Anne Wareham: www.veddw.com



*Cowslips at Veddw
(Charles Hawes)*



*Grassland rich
in Ox-eye Daisies
(Charles Hawes)*

Wildlife Conservation Partners

Gwent Wildlife Trust

MMG has worked closely with GWT and staff members Gemma Bodé and Rebecca Price have served on our committee. Survey results from MMG members' fields are sent to GWT and have helped to identify species-rich meadows as Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs). Until 2007, MMG meadows data contributed to the Gwent Grasslands Initiative. More recently, owners of LWSs can apply to Monmouthshire County Council's Natural Assets Project, administered by GWT, for funding towards maintaining or improving their grasslands. They are also invited to

GWT's annual Landowner Days to learn more about management.

GWT collects seed from Pentwyn or New Grove hay meadows, using the jointly owned MMG/GWT seed harvester, for distribution to MMG members to enhance species-poor fields or to introduce Yellow-rattle to reduce the vigour of over-dominant grass species. MMG working parties have helped with tasks such as Green-winged Orchid counts at New Grove and cutting and raking off the wet meadow at Tymawr, now under a management agreement with GWT.



*Seed sowing on road verge
with Gwent Wildlife Trust
(Margaret Biss)*



*GWT and MMG work
party sowing seeds
on a member's farm
(Margaret Biss)*

Bumblebee Conservation Trust

The Bumblebee Conservation Trust was established because of serious concerns about the dramatic reduction in bumblebee populations over the last 80 years. The Trust shares the aims of MMG to create and restore the flower-rich habitats on which bumblebees depend.

Two bumblebee species have become extinct in Britain and MMG have collaborated with the BCT to help improve the habitat, and the long term prospects, for another vulnerable species, the Shrill Carder Bee. Pippa Rayner of BCT gave two talks to MMG, in Monmouth and at Shirenewton, explaining how landowners can help bumblebees.



Red-tailed Bumblebee
(Ray Armstrong)



White-tailed Bumblebee
(Keith Moseley)

Parish Grasslands Project George Peterken

The Parish Grasslands Project started in April 2001 as a response to a crisis. The country's livestock was under attack from Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy and the dreaded Foot-and-mouth disease, stock movement was hugely restricted and farming bureaucracy was burgeoning. Locally, many herds and flocks were destroyed and we thought all the intricate personal arrangements to cut hay and graze fields that kept our surroundings attractive would break down. We could easily envisage the patchwork of small fields in Brockweir, Hewelsfield and St Briavels where we lived becoming a claustrophobic mass of scrub, losing in the

process not just our views but also the flowers in our fields.

Against this background, a group of us met to discuss whether we should try to do something to avert this prospect. We thought some kind of mutual-help arrangement might be worth exploring, just to make it easier for residents to maintain their fields as grassland. So, we called an open meeting in the Mackenzie Hall to measure the interest and support for such a project, and were taken aback to find about 65 people in the audience.

Thus the Parish Grasslands Project was born. In the years since, we have done our best to help field owners and users and to raise interest in our surroundings. When we started, we were unique as a community-based grassland conservation project but our example was quickly followed over the Wye when the Monmouthshire Meadows Group was established, and then very recently to the east by the Dean Meadows Group. Elsewhere in Britain, grassland conservation projects have been sponsored by organisations like the National Trust, and run with the help of paid project officers, but we and the neighbouring groups have done it ourselves, albeit with welcome help from the Wye Valley AONB Office and various funding sources.

Of course, since the Millennium, the diseases (but not the bureaucracy) have abated and the sheep and some cattle returned. Whilst many flower-rich fields have been maintained, many on the fringes of The Hudnalls have been neglected, and in some cases built on, so we have not been entirely successful. We have, however, found ourselves changing gradually from 'just-grasslands' to a wider interest in the whole environment, and that is the direction we see ourselves going in the future. We have, for example, recently held a mini-symposium on 'wood', i.e., the use of trees and woodland management.

Our philosophy has been that we exist to interest and help, not to tell field owners what to do. We do not want the land to be just a nature reserve, but to be used in ways that maintain the diversity of our surroundings. To this end we have: helped field-owners enter the Environmental Stewardship Scheme;

operated a management service; published a regular *Newsletter* and walks leaflets; published our profusely-illustrated *Flowers in the Fields*; held numerous meetings on subjects ranging from local wildlife and food from our fields to practical land management, including cider making, orchard renewal, boundary management, keeping sheep and using sheep products; and we have hosted visits from official bodies and voluntary groups elsewhere who have been keen to see how community conservation, in the broader sense, works. Recently, and with the help of the AONB office, we have run four shepherding courses for members of all the local grassland groups, which have even attracted participants from further afield.

It is difficult to estimate our impact on the ground. Field use has continued to change, and more fields are neglected now than at the Millennium, but we think we have helped retard a decline and maintain particular flower-rich fields. Fields owned by Jean Green, Ann Chard and Liz Rush, for example, are still flower-rich meadows, partly due to help arranged by the PGP. The first is notable as the location for our annual Flower Hunt for the local play group and primary school. Several residents who have moved in since the PGP started have also found the PGP helpful in setting up their own smallholdings, including current committee members Mike Topp and Deborah Flint. We also hope that we have interested many visitors, as well as local residents and children, in our surroundings and that this will help in many un-measurable ways to maintain our attractive environment.



Panorama of The Hudnalls (created by Tony Eggar from photographs by George Peterken)

Dean Meadows Group

Derek Foster

During the summer of 2011, moves got under way to start a meadows group for the whole of the Forest of Dean. For several years we had been visiting neighbouring areas and seeing wonderful meadows in the Wye Valley and the St Briavels area. Some of us were members of the Parish Grasslands Project and the Monmouthshire Meadows Group and went to their Open Days and meetings where there seemed to be strong community interest and lots of projects going on.



Meeting at Flaxley (Derek Foster)

Several of us already had meadows in the Flaxley/Pope's Hill area, which we managed for hay and sheep grazing. Then Chris Parsons invited Steph Tyler and George Peterken to his Flaxley meadows and they acknowledged the richness of meadow flora that was preserved there. Perhaps there were other meadows to be discovered with owners who would want to join a group?

Although the Forest has a central core of woodland it also has a lot of interesting 'edge' and properties with small fields and a bit of orchard. The ground can be sloping and much of it covered with Bracken and brambles, but we felt there was potential for meadow making.

Chris was inspired to set up a meeting and Maggie Biss kindly offered to tell us about how MMG started and its

first few years. We decided that we had enough potential to continue. The launch on 31st January 2012, a public meeting at Westbury with local speakers, Steph Tyler, George Peterken and Rosie Kelsall from Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, attracted 130 people, and we were all delighted.

After the launch, we held some Open Days (not a great year for sunshine), a stall at Blakeney Duck Fair (good, until the thunderstorm) and Westbury Carnival. We had a steady stream of new members asking for botanical surveys and management advice. Over the summer, Viv Phillips, Rosie Kelsall and Anne Smithells surveyed 22 members' fields, sent the survey records to Gloucestershire Centre for Environment Records, and produced individual reports with management advice for the owners.

Towards the end of the season we turned our minds to winter and held an evening meeting at Bream. About 40 people came along for wine and cheese, a talk by Rosie and one of our members about their battles to turn difficult sites into meadows, and for some discussion. We have recently entered a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to help us reach out for new members and other owners across the Dean. We held another meeting in March 2013 with



Open day at The Meeting House, Chris Parson's meadow (Derek Foster)

a talk by Rob Jarman who is a geographer and ecologist now working with the National Trust.

In our first year we have gained a membership of over 50 and our initial hopes have been more than justified. We thank Monmouthshire Meadows Group and the

Parish Grasslands Project for giving us the impetus to get started and for guiding us around potential pitfalls.

Many congratulations from the Dean Meadows Group on reaching your tenth anniversary.



*Clockwise from top left:
Bird's-foot Trefoil (Jon Dunkelman),
Longhorn Beetle on Catsear (Ray
Armstrong), Hay-rattle (Keith
Moseley), Field Scabious (Jeremy
Harris), Burnet Companion on
Bluebells (Ray Armstrong), Bugle
(Stephanie Tyler)*

Looking Forward

Our Aims for the Next Ten Years

We shall:

- ◆ Learn from and build on our experiences over the last 10 years
- ◆ Provide regular attractive and informative newsletters and a good quality website
- ◆ Continue to hold Open Days so that people can enjoy good quality species-rich grasslands
- ◆ Continue carrying out surveys and giving advice where desired
- ◆ Re-survey some sites at a different time of year from when first surveyed to identify more species but also to assess the effectiveness of their management
- ◆ Help members find local contractors to cut hay and to control Bramble, Bracken etc, and also to use the MMG Tracmaster where appropriate. Consideration will be given to the purchase of a small baler to attach to the Tracmaster
- ◆ Help members find graziers to provide stock to graze pastures or for aftermath grazing in hay fields
- ◆ Continue to organise work parties to help members with a problem
- ◆ Ensure all good species-rich sites are confirmed as Local Wildlife Sites so that owners can benefit from available grants
- ◆ Help eligible members to obtain grants for capital works
- ◆ Spread the word about the importance of species-rich grassland and the need to manage it to avoid coarse grasses, brambles and scrub developing
- ◆ Help schools, church groups, local communities and councils develop wildflower meadows in churchyards, school grounds, road verges and other public spaces
- ◆ Encourage gardeners to find a place for mini meadows
- ◆ Attract more members especially in the central, northern and western areas of the county
- ◆ Inspire people in other areas to create meadow groups
- ◆ Help people to develop their plant identification skills
- ◆ Continue to co-operate with and support partners working to conserve wildlife and protect biodiversity

Funding Partners

We thank many people and organisations who have helped us over the last 10 years.

Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Wye Valley (AONB)

In 2004, the AONB Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) provided MMG's contribution towards purchase of an alpine tractor and other equipment shared with the Parish Grasslands Project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. In 2009, when this arrangement ended, MMG received a tractor, along with a baler, tedder and wrapper.

In 2004/05, AONB SDF funded a course in hedge laying, purchase of a power scythe and the botanical training of members.

In 2006/07, AONB SDF funded botanical training, botanical field surveying, seed sowing and an investigation into different grazing scenarios for which we purchased the Exmoor ponies.

In 2013, AONB SDF has contributed to the production of this book.

Awards for All Wales

This Welsh equivalent of the Heritage Lottery Fund provided MMG's contribution to the purchase of an Eyre seed harvester, shared with GWT.

Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales (CPRW)

CPRW provided space in their marquee for our display at the Usk and Monmouth Shows.

Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)

In 2009, CCW funded repairs to the tractor and trailer and the purchase of a mower.

In 2010, CCW funded the project, "Conserving Shrill Carder Bees in Monmouthshire" carried out with the Bumblebee Conservation Trust. The grant funded the purchase of the Tracmaster, used to clear brambles and improve habitat for this rare bee.

In 2011, CCW funded further work, including the purchase of a better hay baler.

Environment Wales

In 2011, this partnership of voluntary organisations, funded by the Welsh Government, provided travel costs for carrying out survey work and for collating survey data to report on species' distributions across members' sites.

Flora Locale

In 2009, Flora Locale funded bramble cutting on three sites in the spring.

Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations (GAVO)

In 2010, we received an award from GAVO and a cheque to contribute to our work.



Goldfinch (Ray Armstrong)

Pori, Natur a Threftadaeth (PONT)

This Welsh arm of the Grazing Animals Project has helped with costs of health care for the Exmoor ponies, and has funded electric stock-proof fencing and transportation of the ponies between sites. PONT ponies have grazed some MMG members' fields.

Monmouthshire County Council (MCC)

From 2003, for several years we received funding from the MCC's Local Agenda 21 Biodiversity grants. This paid for botanical training, quantitative botanical surveying and fencing and cutting of scrub on members' fields. Specialist surveys by mycologists and entomologists and general publicity about the work of the group were also paid for from this fund.

Tidy Towns

In 2010, Tidy Towns, a joint initiative between Keep Wales Tidy (KWT) and MCC, funded a tractor driving course at Usk College for the haymaking team.

Tidy Local Communities funding paid for early website development, printing and posters for Open Days, and some hand tools (scythes, rakes and pitchforks).

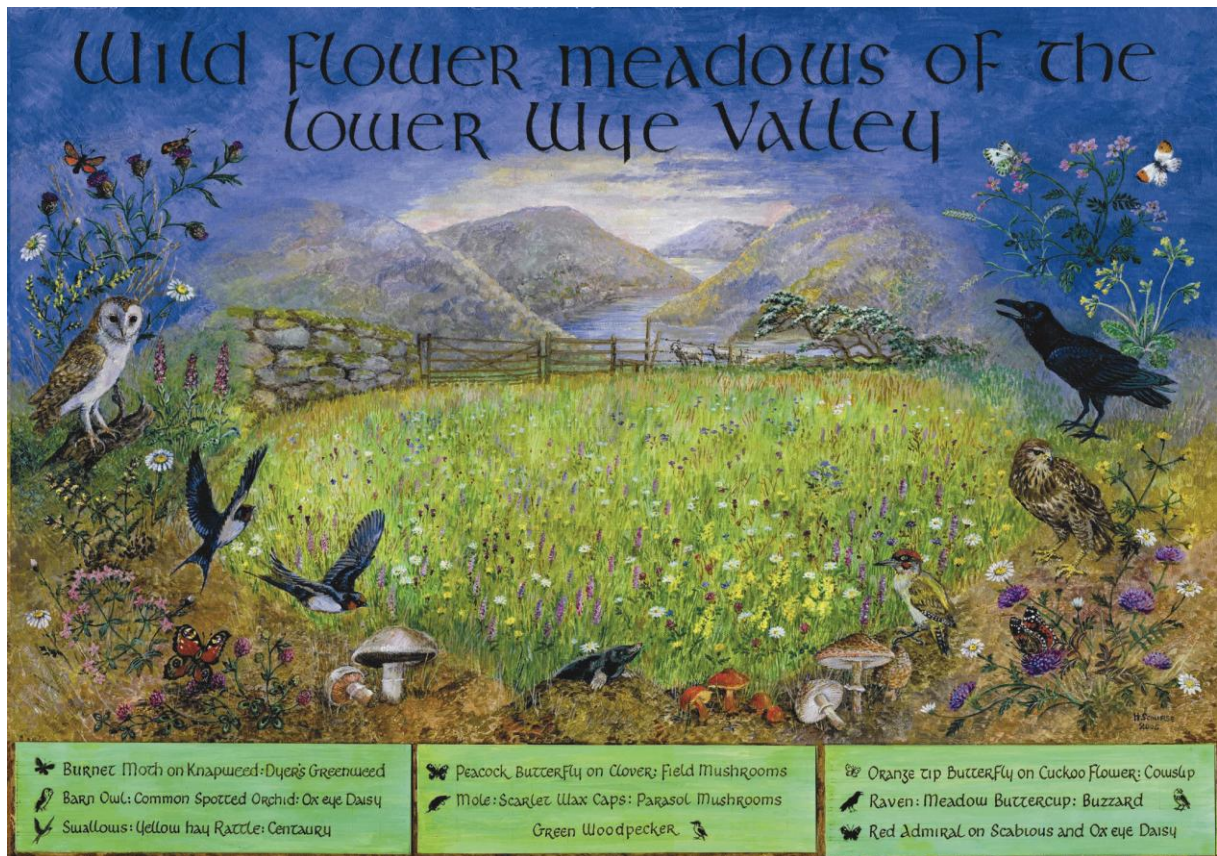
KWT also fund our public liability insurance.

More detailed information about our funding is available in annual and biannual reports on the MMG web site.



Gwent Wildlife Trust reserve at Pentwyn Farm (Ray Armstrong)

Useful Websites



Original painting by Helen Scourse as used on the MMG display boards at Tintern Station, Trellech, St Briavels and Brockweir shop

TEN YEARS OF MONMOUTHSHIRE MEADOWS GROUP

We have published this book to celebrate ten years of helping people to conserve and restore flower-rich grasslands in Monmouthshire and further afield. We hope it will serve as a guide and inspiration for anyone responsible for land, whether it is a small piece of verge or rolling acres of pasture, to enable you to manage your own fields and gardens effectively, and to maintain and increase the rich variety of plants and animals these areas support.

Monmouthshire Meadows Group is a registered charity, number 1111345
We are funded by grants, donations, membership fees and fund raising activities organised by our members

*If you have a meadow or pasture, or are interested in conserving wildflower-rich grassland, please join us! Details can be found on our website
www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk*

