

MONMOUTHSHIRE MEADOWS

Aim - To conserve and enhance the landscape by enabling members to maintain, manage and restore their semi-natural grasslands and associated features.

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From the Chair Stephanie Tyler

The spring and summer of 2011 have been very busy for the Group - filling in more applications for funding; sorting grazing for the ponies; carrying out work tasks; organising the Open Day; having a presence at various events; giving talks and carrying out surveys of new members' fields and advisory visits - has taken many many hours of time and effort.

The work of MMG was recognised by **GAVO** (Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations) in the Group

winning the Greenweb Environment Group award for 2011. At an awards ceremony in June in Usk, we received a framed certificate and a cheque for £50.



Steph with Dick Cole of Gavo

I am delighted to announce that **Environment Wales**, A partnership of voluntary organisations funded through Welsh Assembly Government is to give MMG almost £1,000. This is partly for travel costs associated with survey work on members' fields but mainly for a report that collates all our existing data and the follow-up visits we have made to sites surveyed first five or six years ago. We greatly appreciate this financial help and we thank the support of the Wales Heathland and Lowland Grassland Group and also of Alison Colebrook of the Welsh Wildlife Trusts for encouraging MMG with the application and helping us develop various MMG policies (Health & Safety, Welsh Language, Volunteering and Environment policies) that were needed for the application.

The financial support of the **Countryside Council for Wales** is also much appreciated with special thanks to Rob Bacon and Miki Miyata-Lee of CCW for their help and support towards our last

application – for a baler, trailer and seed-harvesting costs.

CCW of course enabled us to buy our hardy Trakmaster machine which has again been active on various sites through the autumn cutting grass and brambles.

The funding from **PONT** towards the upkeep of our two Exmoor Ponies enabled us to buy various items including more electric fencing; Alan and Steph Poulter continue to bear the brunt of the work involved in caring for them and transporting them to members' fields.

Other initiatives with which MMG has been involved include sitting on a committee that aims to restore a hay-meadow at Llanyrafon and advising the co-ordinators of the Two Rivers Project in Monmouth. We have

also given talks to several local groups including the gardening club at The Narth.

Our basic work has continued with many surveys carried out during the spring and summer on new members' fields and on those of potential new members. Yet more sites that reach the criteria of Local Wildlife Sites have been discovered, for example some lovely fields near Earlswood owned by Chris and Joni Gooch. Another such candidate Local Wildlife Site is Monmouthshire County Council's interesting meadows by the River Wye at Tintern Station. Follow-ups were also made at a number of sites previously surveyed. I thank Glynis Laws, Maggie Biss and Sheelagh Kerry for their assistance with some surveys. Caroline Howard has continued her work restoring species-rich grassland at St Mary's Church at Tintern and a highlight this summer was the discovery of a Martagon Lily in full flower.

Bill Howard reports in this newsletter on our hay-making activities which partly because of the weather and partly because of problems with machinery were not a resounding success this year. Some members were happy but others were unfortunately not. It should be remembered though that Bill and volunteers, notably Martin Fenn-Smith, Lindsay Tyler and Ed Rogers have put in a huge amount of effort on this. Our excellent Trakmaster machine (allen scythe), bought with CCW funding, has however, been much in use at various sites, clearing long grass and brambles.

Mini meadows

Stephanie Tyler

You don't need to have a field to create a meadow and help increase biodiversity. Anyone with a lawn or spare patch of ground in their garden can create mini meadow. With a lawn it is easy – simply stop mowing an



Garden bank in Llandogo

Photo: Ann Hercocck

area after the end of March or mid April and see what appears. Even if only White Clover and Self Heal flower it is better for bees, grasshoppers and spiders than a mown lawn. If few species appear, you can always add wildflower seed sourced locally through MMG or a firm that uses local seed such as Plant Wild, Leominster. Likewise if you have a spare patch in the garden of bare ground, try sowing some wild flower seed in the late summer/autumn.

All you have to do to maintain the meadow is leave well alone from the end of March and then cut it in mid July or as late as September and do remember to rake all the cut material off so that you do not mulch the ground. Wild flowers prosper best in soil with a low fertility. A second cut of your mini-meadow may be needed in the late autumn or at the end of the winter then just leave it for four or more months.

We stopped cutting part of our lawn in 2010 and immediately had several Spotted Orchids appear; this year there were four flowering spikes. Perhaps they were there all along but never surfaced because of being mown. In Penallt village some modern houses built since 1980 on old meadows have lawns

where Green-winged Orchids still appear and in Chepstow our President Trevor Evans has the small orchid, Autumn Ladies Tresses, on his lawn in the summer.

During our surveys of members' fields we have come across some lovely examples of mini meadows.

At the interesting garden at the Veddw owned by Anne Wareham and Charles Hawes, there are two areas of meadow with lots of interesting native meadow flowers including Lousewort. In one mini meadow various other bulbous plants have been added.

Jeremy Harris and Claire Adamson just over the county border at Broadoak have a lovely garden meadow that they created from scratch with Ox-eye Daisies, Field Scabious and Ladies Bedstraw. At Llandogo Ann Hercocck also has a mini meadow in her garden, rife with Ox-eye Daisies but amongst them a host of other species including this year her first Spotted Orchid. At Mitchel Troy Gill Pollock has a beautiful bank in her garden with many orchids and other typical meadow species. Just up the road from Gill is Nigel and Jane Seathornes' garden where two areas of lawn have been allowed to develop as mini meadows. In

one small area in June there were two huge flowering spikes of Broad-leaved Helleborine.



Broad-leaved Helleborines

I gave a talk about the Meadows Group to North Gardening Club at the end of May and sang the praises of garden meadow patches to provide refuges for meadow plants but also to provide food and shelter for a range of insects and other invertebrates. Afterwards John Dransfield, the Chairman, showed me his garden where he and his wife had a superb mini-meadow with 20+ Spotted Orchids! **Contd page 6**

**Focus on members efforts
Land in the Whitebrook Valley**
Stephanie Tyler

Land in the Whitebrook Valley
In the 1980s a steep north-facing field in the Whitebrook valley across from Kinson Farm was a flower-rich pasture and worthy of being a Local Wildlife Site. Sadly over the next 25 years or so no grazing occurred and brambles and scrub gradually took over the field, leaving in 2009 just a tiny area of grassland in the middle. Then MMG members, Sarah Cheese and Tom Cousins from Coleford bought the field and set themselves the task of restoring it. They and their two boys have spent numerous days clearing brambles and cutting back the

scrub during the last two years. On one winter's day a few MMG members went along to help. At both ends of the field Sarah and Tom have planted native trees but they are restoring the grassland over much of the area. Amazingly when dense brambles were cleared back, Spotted Orchids instantly appeared.

The remnant grassland patch has now greatly expanded and various grasses, Knapweed, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Sorrel, Tormentil and Lesser Stitchwort again flourish.

On the bottom edge adjacent to the Gwent Wildlife Trust's Margarets Wood are abundant Wild Daffodils whilst in the shadier area below the woodland on the top border are Bluebells, Pignut and violets galore spreading down in to the field.

Management is quite labour-intensive because Sarah and Tom don't want machines on the land in case Slow Worms are killed.



The field covered in brambles

Whitebrook



Winter work party Whitebrook



Spring in same field, Whitebrook

An exciting find in the spring of 2011 were three or four patches of the rare Oak Fern along the woodland edge with more patches being found in the woodland above which belongs to MMG members Frank and Tina Chetwynd of the Narth.



Oak Fern

They have seen many Slow Worms there and this year were pleased to find a Grass Snake. They continue to clear back the brambles and some of the grass Sarah and Tom cut by hand and rake off but in July this year MMG's two ponies, Jemima and Jacinth, helped graze the area, fenced in by MMG's electric fencing. In the winter of 2011/12 it is hoped to fence the top of the field adjacent to the wood to make it more stock proof.

New project to help Local Wildlife Sites
Rebecca Price



Monmouthshire County Council has secured funding to set up the 'Natural Assets Project'.

This has a small grants scheme attached, and will help local community groups and landowners to preserve and enhance some of the best places for wildlife in Monmouthshire – known as our 'Local Wildlife Sites'.

We are lucky in Monmouthshire to have some fantastic wildlife-rich habitats; from wildflower-rich meadows to ancient woodlands, teeming with a variety of flora and fauna. Local Wildlife Sites are a way of recognising some of these best places for wildlife.

Local Wildlife Sites are areas considered to be of particular wildlife value locally because of the variety of species they

support. They are a voluntary system to encourage and support landowners to learn about the special wildlife on their land and how to care for it, and are a reason to be proud. Monmouthshire already has over 300 Local Wildlife Sites, many owned by MMG members, but there are more to be discovered!

The Natural Assets Project will be delivered by Gwent Wildlife Trust and staff will be on hand to assist with wildlife surveys and management advice, plus help applicants with the associated grant scheme. Grants of up to £2,000 are available. This could include money for fencing to help a neglected site be grazed, restoring a dry-stone wall or help with managing a meadow.

If you have a Local Wildlife Site and would like to discuss the grant scheme please contact: Rebecca Price, Project Officer, Gwent Wildlife Trust
rprice@gwentwildlife.org or 01600 740600

Welcome to New Members
Pam Lloyd

Opening the mail and seeing that it is a new membership form is always a delight for me as it means that we are fulfilling our objectives. So it is with pleasure that we welcome the following as new members this year: Susan Antrum; Joni Gooch; Anne Hercock; Jane & Tony Pannette; Janet Parker; Frances Rhodes; Nicola & David Robinson; Marion Stainton and Dr Mary Rome.

Open Day June 2011

Glynis Laws

Coming out to visit a hay meadow was not at the top of everyone's list of things to do on the Sunday that we chose to open members' meadows. Amidst a summer of worries about drought this was perhaps the one day that stood out as a real washout. Sadly, the weather kept most sensible folk away but the people who did turn up were very enthusiastic, keen to see all the plants of interest at each site and to establish or improve their own meadows. Five sites were open, including the Lloyds's lovely meadow at New Grove Farm where visitors also had the chance to see the neighbouring hay meadows on Gwent Wildlife Trust's reserve. At Ty Mawr, the convents cook had made delicious cakes; there was not much profit for her but the cakes did sustain Glynis and Sheelagh while they waited damply for visitors. Other sites were open in Botany bay, Catbrook and Steph and Lindsay's pasture in Penallt.....next year we are thinking of spreading the open 'day' over two weekends. This should allow for more sites to be open and, hopefully, mean that more people will be able to enjoy a Monmouthshire meadow at its best, in the sunshine.

number of horses and ponies that died from Ragwort poisoning and/or false claims that landowners have legal obligations to 'control' the plant. The facts are that a landowner may be ordered to control Ragwort if there is a significant risk to livestock and if they have not followed the Government's Ragwort code but there is no legal obligation in the UK. Obviously if you are going to take a hay crop, you definitely should remove all Ragwort before the grass is cut as it is in hay that Ragwort may be eaten and cause liver damage and possible death to horses and ponies. In a grazing pasture or by road verges and forest tracks horses, ponies and other animals, rabbits included, avoid growing plants. At least 30 insect species, some scarce or rare, are entirely reliant on Ragwort and the Ragwort flowers are an important source of nectar and pollen for hundreds of other invertebrates.



Small Copper on Ragwort

Wye Valley AONB and several others. Activities for children, and talks and guided walks on wildlife and gardening for the grown-ups ensured there was something to interest everyone.



Glynis Laws with visitors on our stand

MMG had a stand and we took along photo display boards illustrating the work done by volunteers. We were delighted with the number of people who visited the stand to find out more about wildflower meadows. In particular, several people were keen to know how they could acquire seed and go about creating their own meadow or mini-meadow within their gardens. As well as new enthusiasts, it was interesting to hear from two retired farmer about their long-established meadows and who will be happy to show them to us in the Spring and also from other people who remembered how hay meadows used to be.

Ragwort – what is the legal position?

In the August 2011 issue of 'British Wildlife' in the Conservation News section was a short piece about Ragwort. The Advertising Standards Authority had asked various organisations such as Monsanto and the British Horse Society to withdraw from their websites and leaflets inaccurate and misleading statements about Ragwort. There were exaggerated claims about the

Gwent Wildlife Trust Open Day at at Dingestow Court

Glynis Laws

Gwent Wildlife Trust's headquarters is at Dingestow Court. Its owners, Mr and Mrs Anthony Bosanquet, opened the lovely garden and grounds for the Trust's Open Day in August. Other groups with interests in wildlife and conservation were invited to share the day and provided stands devoted to beekeeping, Transition Monmouth (who had their fancy, electric bicycle on display), the

New Meadows Group forming in the Forest of Dean

During the summer months, there has been an unusual amount of to-ing and fro-ing of MMG committee members to the Forest of Dean village of Flaxley in Gloucestershire near Newnham, Instigated by Chris Parsons, who has some wonderful wild flower meadows of his own, a group of local enthusiasts with wildlife interests ranging from botanists to hoverfly and moth

experts have decided that they too might like to set of a group to encourage wild flower meadow conservation in the Forest of Dean. They will be holding their first open meeting to investigate interest and encourage membership at Westbury Parish Hall on **Wednesday January 25th at 7:30pm** (bar will be open) with Stephanie Tyler and George Peterken. All are welcome.

SOUTH EAST WALES BIOLOGICAL RECORDS CENTRE (SEWBRcC)

In Committee meetings we often mention SEWBRcC and at the last meeting several people asked for clarification of the acronym.

Most counties now have a biological records centre as a repository for all records of plants, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates and indeed anything else. The records centres perform a very valuable function in inputting, storing and collating the information received. This is of great use for conservation. For example, once the data are entered the records centre can, at a click of a button, provide distribution maps of any species. Another use is when there is a proposed development; the records centre can produce a print-out of all plants and animals (all taxa) in a given one kilometre square that have been recorded. There is however, a note of caution in that an absence of a record at a particular location does not mean an absence of that species necessarily but more an absence of a record of that species.

In Monmouthshire we share a records centre with Glamorgan; this is the South East Wales Biological Records Centre or SEWBRcC as it is usually called.

SEWBRcC is based in Cardiff and most organisations, whether a voluntary body as the Gwent Wildlife Trust or the Gwent Ornithological Society, or a government body as the Countryside Council for Wales pass on records to the centre. Local authorities help fund the centre and have a reciprocal agreement to receive information when needed.

Monmouthshire Meadows Group passes on plant and butterfly information to SEWBRcC from all of our surveys but SEWBRcC always welcomes more records of rarities but also of common species to give a fuller picture of a species' range and abundance. So for example, if you see a hedgehog, any snake or lizard, a beetle that you can identify or anything please send the data (species, date and location preferably to a six figure grid reference but at least the 1 km square grid reference to SEWBRcC at info@sewbrec.org.uk or fill out the online form at www.sewbrec.org.uk

Hay making Report Bill Howard

MMG now have a full set of hay making machinery including the tractor, the Klaas M60 mower, a tedder and a newly acquired New Holland baler, which makes small square bales.

We made hay for 5 members who all have small fields. Once again the weather was against us with no long fine spell but rather short fine periods punctuated by periods of rain. The baler, which is about 20 years old, tends to produce banana-shaped bales, with one string taut and one slack which means that the bales fall to bits when they are handled. The problem is to do with the pressure in the

bale making chamber. This will be fixed! We kept a time sheet of tractor hours from which we have derived detailed statistics about the cost of hay making. The cost per bale ranged from £4 to a horrifying £11, depending on the size of the field, its accessibility and the amount of grass and its dampness. This calculation includes travel time but not "down" time.

MMG haymaking has been a sharp learning curve for all of us – if there are any experts out there midst our members, we would be grateful for your input during the coming year. Many thanks to Ed Rogers for his invaluable help.

More on Mini meadows

When Martin and Patricia Milling moved in to Blue Door, Far Hill, Llanishen they left unmown a lovely bank near the house. This is covered with hundreds of Wild Daffodils in the spring. This autumn they found myriads of Meadow Saffrons or Autumn Crocuses on the bank. This just shows that if you stop mowing an area of grass, you might be rewarded with a lovely surprise.



Meadow Saffron Photo: Patricia Milling

**.....And more on
Mini Meadows
Gilly Pollock**

(First published in
The Cottage Gardener, March 2011)

Many of us long to have a wildflower meadow in our own garden to attract wildlife and to provide a softer, natural patch to more formal gardens. 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 a half acre hillside garden. The land is split into three areas to fit within the landscape. Each area has some lawn but they all have their own unique characteristics. Two lawns are quite 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 moss lawn as its lovely to walk on bare footed in the summer, so we left it 'au naturel'.

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

spring flowers, came ladies smock, native bluebells, germander speedwell, pignut, bugle, selfheal, sorrel, red clover, buttercups, bird's foot trefoil, cat's ear, rough hawk bit and, in early June, common spotted orchids. A range of grasses followed through-out the summer. 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. Hubby was desperate to get the lawn mower out but I persuaded him to leave it and over the years he has accepted that this lawn is now our very own natural meadow.

We asked Stephanie Tyler, to carry out a survey. Although I was excited by our meadow, I didn't think it was of any great interest, as many people have much larger meadows in the area. Much to my surprise, the survey showed that we have an area of unimproved grassland, with over 50 species of flowers and grasses in our small patch. It has over eight of the indicator plants to make it a county 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 we have doubled the number of orchids to 19 plants.

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 species such as bees, butterflies, hoverflies, ladybirds and a range of moths and other

insects makes it very worthwhile. The protection of small areas of meadows is very important to provide wildflower corridors for all insects but especially bees. Monmouthshire is home to several species of bees including the rare shrill carder bee, so I feel that I am doing my bit to support the local bee population. Leaving the meadow uncut until mid September allows time for all bees to have bred for the next season. Admittedly by this time the meadow looks pretty tired and messy, but you need to leave it until the seeds have set and the bees have dined out on their last supper.

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

**Parish Grasslands
Project**

**'Sward to Sweater'
Saturday, 29th**

**October
in**

**Brockweir Village
Shop Loft
at 2.00pm**

A new initiative with talks about keeping sheep-demonstrations of shearing, knitting, felting, spinning and dying, knitting & weaving
Please contact

**Sarah.Sawyer@tiscali.co.uk
If you would like to attend.**

Local Wild Life Sites

Stephanie Tyler

A **Wildlife Site** is an area considered to be of particular conservation value locally and that fulfils certain criteria. For example, a field that qualifies as a Local Wildlife Site must have at least eight well-distributed plant species from an agreed list of 'indicator' species. Woodlands, wetlands, ponds and other habitats all have their own list of species or features, a proportion of which must be represented if the site is to qualify. A site is designated as a Wildlife Site with the full knowledge and co-operation of the owner. A panel of experts from the Countryside Council for Wales, Monmouthshire County Council, Gwent Wildlife Trust and Monmouthshire Meadows Group discusses each site and approves its designation or otherwise.

Designation has very few if any drawbacks. It may help protect the site from adverse development but does not commit the owner to anything; indeed grants are more likely to be available to help with management if you are an owner of a Wildlife Site than a site not so designated. You may also hear of the designation **Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation** or SINC's. These are similar to Local Wildlife Sites in being of high conservation value locally but are planning tools for Local Authorities and unlike Local Wildlife Sites SINC's are designated without the

landowners' knowledge. Many woodlands are SINC's and so too are some of our important rivers such as the River Monnow and Gavenny.

Among MMG members there are 43 who are proud owners of Local Wildlife Sites and 18 who have candidate Wildlife Sites. A candidate site is one that is believed to fulfil the criteria but that has not yet been discussed and approved by the Panel. These sites are the 'cream' of our remaining species-rich grasslands and anyone who owns such a site has a special responsibility to manage it to safeguard the botanical interest. Help may be available through grants

We are grateful for funding from



And help with ponies and grazing from



And finally!

Meadow at St Mary's Priory, Abergavenny

Jill Featherstone

Last year in St Mary's Prior, Abergavenny, MMG along with a team of volunteers led by Velia Ellis, seeded a small area of the Abbots Garden using wild flower and grass seed harvested from members meadows. To assist with a bit of instant impact in the first season, commercially bought poppy and cornflower seeds were also sown. We are pleased to report that the meadow has been a great success with an abundance of hay rattle and oxeye daisies, as well as a good distribution of other meadow flowers and grasses. It was interesting to note that although the poppies also put on a good display, no cornflowers germinated. The meadow has become an important part of the gardens which have been planted with the aim to educate both the public and school groups in the traditional use of plants both medicinally and nutritionally. The meadow not only looked stunning but enhancing the population of plants for honey bees and other pollinating insect that thrive at the Priory.

HELP!

We would love to have help from MMG members (or your friends) on helping with various tasks, such as this Newsletter and, generally, computer driven publicity materials. Alternatively, more physical help with Haymaking and general work parties. Please contact Steph or Maggie