



Habitats & Meadows Group Newsletter December 2019



Record-breaking Orchids!

“2019 was a bumper year for greater butterfly orchids (*platanthera chlorantha*) at North Wales Wildlife Trust’s Caeau Tan-y-Bwlch nature reserve. These distinctive pale orchids – pollinated at night by moths such as the Silver Y – are counted by NWWT and Plantlife volunteers on the last Saturday in June every year. The previous record count of flowering spikes, from 2015, was 4798 but this was blown out of the water in 2019 with a huge count of 8712!

I put this down to 2 factors –

1. The usual annual late summer haycut wasn’t done at the reserve in 2018 due to the spring drought severely suppressing sward growth, which gave wildflowers the maximum opportunity to flower and set seed. Also, the regular autumn cattle grazing was left on longer than usual instead.
2. The ongoing battle with bracken encroachment into the meadows, particularly around the field margins, is finally showing positive results after years of effort. I recommend cutting and removing the bracken at least twice a season (NWWT use a Rytec), rather than rolling and / or bashing, as being the most effective management tool.

Whilst the number of orchids counted is only a crude indicator of effective haymeadow management for biodiversity, 2019 does seem to have been a good year generally for wildflowers. The haycut was done at Caeau Tan-y-Bwlch this summer, lower orchid numbers next year...but watch this space!”

Rob Booth (NWWT Reserves Officer)

Against All Odds!

We bought out house in Nant Peris 25 years ago which came with a field which was used as a campsite. We’ve spent the last 23 yrs fighting to keep sheep and goats out and have only just succeeded! We decided to turn the field into a meadow – given that we live in the wettest place in Wales we weren’t sure what success we would have. However two years down the line we have doubled the wild flower species; witnessed a huge increase in insects (on a sunny day the grasshoppers can be deafening) and the presence of a Southern Hawker was a special highlight. We also have more nesting birds than ever with dozens of young in the Spring. It’s hard work and we still get the odd blimmin sheep who makes it through the defences but it’s one of the best things we have done.

Penny Garnett

Orchids and Waxcaps

Just a little story from Ty Gwyn near Llanbedrgoch, Anglesey where I have been working. The owners have been managing two meadows as wildflower meadows on limestone soils for 20 years since they acquired the land. Previously it was intensively managed grassland. It’s taken many years for the diversity to recover but surveys this summer have produced 5 orchid species including Common Twayblade (left) and Early Marsh Orchids. Then later this autumn a speculative grassland fungi survey revealed 10 species of Waxcap in just one of the meadows, including the rare Pink and Date (right). This was a real surprise and shows the value of long-term management.



Henry Cook (NWWT staff)

To the Rescue!

After losing our regular help with mowing the field Laurence Maxwell from Enfys came to the rescue. With a small



tractor and cutter with a box, the area was harvested and set aside for composting. In view of the species diversity Laurence and John Morris (the Vale of Clwyd Ranger) have suggested we may be able to donate part of the crop for rewilding next year. Please spread the word. Despite several enquiries no one has yet come forward to bring a bee nucleus to a hive we have on the site. The



area is considered to be very suitable for beekeeping. We hope to welcome members of the group to visit again next summer and are very happy to welcome anyone who would like to visit us at any time.

Carys & Tim Biddle

Magnificent Meadows Cymru

Plantlife's new project 'Magnificent Meadows Cymru' is now up and running!

The project has five over-arching aims:

- Increase the number and extent of species-rich grasslands to support plants, pollinators and other wildlife populations
- Improve understanding of meadow creation, management and grassland ecosystems
- Develop and support a skilful, networked and informed community who undertake monitoring, engagement and carry out management on meadows and grasslands
- Enable more people in Wales to connect to, care about and benefit from meadows and grasslands
- Improve understanding of the health and well-being benefits of people spending time in meadows and nature

For meadow-owners the aspects of the project that may be most of interest is the aim to increase the number of meadows groups across Wales and to support existing groups. In North Wales the project is currently investigating the potential to start a meadows group in North East Wales.

You may also be interested in the plan to establish 30 community meadows across Wales – these may be publicly owned or could be privately owned by people who wouldn't mind occasional public use of their land!

In 2019 we ran 3 grassland fungi training courses with the aim of training up volunteers to be able to survey grasslands. In 2020 the project will be training people in botanical skills relevant to meadows surveying, invertebrate identification skills, meadow management skills and more!

If any of the above interests you, please do get in touch! Tamsin.Fretwell@plantlife.org.uk

Tamsin Fretwell

A good case for Yarrow!



Holding some Yarrow seed-heads destined for Pensychnant's meadow, I spotted something different - could it be a Case-bearing moth larva? A quick 'google' followed and there it was *Coleophera argentula*, a Yarrow Case-bearer. As the name suggests, the caterpillar feeds from within a protective case, constructed out of silk and seed fragments - in a manner akin to a Caddis Fly larva. They pupate within the case and the tiny moths emerge the following summer. I counted 65 cases in total, even finding one on a patch of unmown lawn! They're under-recorded, so definitely one to look out for.

Jill Tattershall

Hawk-Moth Visitation

I had an exciting visitor in July in the form of the Hummingbird Hawk Moth.

Lesley Woods

Peninsula Project

This year, a Meadow Project was carried out by Jo Porter on the Llŷn peninsula, partly funded by the Llŷn Landscape Partnership. The main aim was to establish a Llŷn Meadow Groups/Dolydd Llŷn, to provide advice on meadow creation/management and to provide a network for meadow owners.

Other aims included revisiting sites that had previously been identified as potential species rich grassland. Out of 36 sites, only 11 remained semi improved; 69% were now categorised as agriculturally improved. Faced with such habitat loss and increasing habitat fragmentation, it has been encouraging to be involved in meadow re-creation: the final aim of the project was to source donor sites for a "Payment for Outcome" trial, run by the National Trust on three of their tenanted farms. This involved the restoration and creation of approx. 7 Hectares of hay meadows mostly using locally sourced green hay.

Another 12 fields, under private ownership, have had locally sourced yellow rattle seeds added in which, hand in hand with correct management, will hopefully see a restoration of species diversity.

If anyone would like to read the full report, please get in touch with Jo for a copy. bardseyjo@gmail.com

Llŷn Meadows Group/Dolydd Llŷn

Focus on Eyebrights

It is worth keeping an eye out for Eyebrights. The flowers are a delight, but working out which Eyebright species you have is not so easy, given the number of species and hybrids to choose from. They do the same job as Yellow Rattle, reducing grass vigour to allow space for other herbs. This year has been my best Eyebright year ever, and Hugh Knott kindly checked out some samples for me (see his excellent website www.cambriaflora.net for photographs). Mine turned out to be the commonest species on Anglesey, *Euphrasia nemorosa*, although I may have more than one Eyebright in my meadow. There's always a chance that you'll have something unusual, the 'KN penny' of the Eyebright world.

James Robertson

Celebrating the Carneddau

The Carneddau Landscape Partnership is a 5 year project running up to 2024 aiming to help people discover, record, care for and celebrate the Carneddau using funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project area includes the high mountains as well as the settlement fringes and valley sides around them.

More information can be found on the Snowdonia National Park website <https://www.snowdonia.gov.wales/looking-after/carneddau-partnership>

Cofnod

Cofnod is your Local Environmental Records Centre that brings together wildlife data across North Wales. It really is worth logging into their website and entering your records. Wildlife records increase knowledge of our environment enabling more informed decisions to be made about its conservation. If not already registered find out more here <https://www.cofnod.org.uk/Home>



Henry Cook's Orchids at Ty Gwyn