



# North Wales Habitats & Meadows Network Newsletter



## 2022

This year visits have featured a wide variety of habitats as well as meadows and the season for these visits extended to November with the increased interest in waxcaps. They are fascinating and attractive in their own right, but also act as indicators of old grassland which has encouraged many of us to go out and search for them. There is now a groundswell of public opinion in favour of green spaces in towns, cities and villages and the value of wildflowers and pollinators is more widely appreciated. Many organisations, scientists and individuals have campaigned to promote these views including our member, Jan Miller. We have included her longer than usual contribution for the story of persistence and success it tells. You can also read the report from the last visit of the season, a Plantlife workshop and news from across the area.

Thank you to everyone who has hosted visits, come along, written reports, contributed to this newsletter and especially to Mark Sheridan for putting it all together. When you think about 2023, please consider hosting a visit, hopefully some East of the Conwy Valley. This newsletter goes to 110 members, all of you contributing to the aim of having 30% of Wales connected and protected for nature's recovery. Craig Bennett (CEO of the Wildlife Trusts) stressed the importance of this aim in his 2022 Lacey Lecture.

**Kate Gibbs**

**Coronation Meadow Caeau Tan y Bwlch**, owned by Plantlife and managed by North Wales Wildlife Trust, donated species-rich green hay to a few local projects this season. Thanks to our long-term contractors Kehoe Countryside, roadside verges near next year's Eisteddfod site in Boduan should be welcoming to visitors - colourful and buzzing with life. NWWT are also working with Trigonos in the Nantlle Valley to make their stunning lakeside meadows more species diverse. Finally, along the main road outside Gwaith Powdwr nature reserve in Penrhyndeudraeth, Ramblers Cymru volunteers helped us prepare some wildflower banks ready for the green hay to be spread. Diolch i bawb am helpu ni!" (Rob has now moved to a new post, still in NW Wales, and the reserves officer is Luke Jones).

**Rob Booth**

**We moved to Llanddeiniolen from Sheffield** at the end of July and are currently learning to manage around 3 acres of land. In early October, Adrian Jones from the NWWT kindly came to see us, as we needed advice on how best to encourage wildlife and biodiversity. We were really pleased to find that there was already a good range of meadow plants in the top field (previously grazed by donkeys) as well as a variety of waxcaps, which we had not come across before.



Since Adrian's visit, we have been discovering more about waxcap grasslands and trying to record what we see. We plan to manage the top field as a hay meadow, starting with a first cut next year. We don't know what the spring will bring, but so far in

terms of fungi we think we have identified ballerina, parrot, slimy, meadow and blackening waxcaps, plus various others (orange, yellow & white) that we are not 100% sure about yet! We have been taking photos and are learning as we go along. At the moment we have no plans to keep animals, so we understand we'll have to simulate grazing by mowing and are hoping to pick up some management tips & advice from this group.

Our other fields are relatively damp (lush grass, willow and alder) and we plan an early spring cut



there to see what emerges. Our boundaries are mostly hazel &



blackthorn. We have some mature trees (sycamore, oak and suffering ash) also birch, holly, rowan etc. There is some ancient woodland to the west of us. In the lower fields there are a couple of small streams that merge to form Nant Efa and there is a longstanding pond situated by the house. It's a beautiful place to live and we feel very privileged to be its new custodians.

**Tony & Claudia Hall, Nant Efa**

**Yet again, 3 barn owl chicks ringed** and recorded from our barn owl box.



One of the parents was seen exploring a new barn owl box, less smelly than her children's pad, the other side of the field.

A leaf cutter bee preparing a nest for her eggs in the shepherds' hut bolt hole, a rather unpromising spot.



A sighting of 2 pied flycatchers by the Dwyfor in our wood stimulated me to immediately put-up new nest boxes as this is on the edge of their breeding territory.



A northern marsh orchid was welcome again: only a small number but always enjoyed.

Plenty of apples of course! Some pears & quinces but no plums. Not many butterflies but plenty of other insects attracting hordes of hirondelles.

**John Butler**

**Tea, cake and conversation** at Waterfall view after a very successful walk.

**Paul Nickson**



**This year, our small wildflower meadow** (about 1/3 of an acre) showed quite an increase in Common Spotted Orchids and their hybrids with Northern Marsh – perhaps as a result of the drier summer?



The yellow rattle continues to spread but so does the knapweed which is very thick in places. In the past we've used the strimmer to cut the meadow and then hand-raked the arisings, but this is hard work especially for vulnerable backs! Baulking at the cost of outside contractors for such a small area, we experimented with what machinery we had to hand. A series of reducing height cuts were made using the tractor-driven topper allowing for some "bounce back" between cuts. Then using the CAT digger blade and large bucket, the risings were pushed into piles and transferred to the dumper for removal. The result was at least as satisfactory as in previous years and infinitely easier.



Earlier in the year we planted about 40 saplings, mostly native deciduous species with a few conifers. Some we had grown ourselves but mainly they came from the TreeShop – good specimens and reasonably priced. So far only 2 failures which given our dry summer is very pleasing. Waxcaps have been appearing over the last few weeks in the top meadow including what I think is *Hygrocybe calyptriformis* – picture shown – new to us. Such a pretty fungi which started out lilac coloured and then faded to a pinker hue, well named as a "ballerina".

**Elsbeth Wagstaffe, Llandyfydog**

## Habitats and Meadows Group visit:

### Caeau 2 Ty'n y Clawdd Tregarth, 13 November 2022.

The site at 2 Ty'n y Clawdd extend to four acres. As far as can be ascertained, the management of most of the fields over the last 70 years has been for hay and pasture. The land is slightly sloping and well-drained with the aspect of all but one field South-East; it has not been ploughed for at least 50 years. In the post-war (WW2) years, until about 2007, lime was applied; and for some of those years basic slag was used (messy apparently!). The soil pH today is neutral. In the last 30 years, the regime has been one of a late hay crop, the regrowth being topped most years by winter grazing by cattle and occasional raiding sheep. The stock is taken off when they might poach the ground in wet weather. In 2018 the tenant farmer was advised, without the owner's knowledge, to weed-wipe with a systemic herbicide. This dramatically reduced the populations of *Plantago lanceolata* Ribwort Plantain and *Ranunculus acris* Meadow Buttercup. Two years of summer grazing by cattle followed and the previously abundant growth of *Rhinanthus major* Yellow Rattle was also greatly reduced. Published studies of waxcaps (some quoted in links below) suggest a direct association between the fungi and both *P. lanceolata* and

the moss *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*; luckily, the moss seems to have been unaffected by the herbicide, the plantain population is recovering – and the waxcap diversity and quantity seems unchanged.

The fields are a good habitat for waxcaps and other grassland fungi. On our October 2021 H&M group visit, only a few early species were seen (Meadow, Parrot, Citrine and Pink waxcaps); this year's visit in November was much more fruitful (and we were fortunate to have unseasonably warm weather for the search). Over the last four years, mid- to late-November seems to have been the best time to see a variety of species at this site.



The 10 waxcap species noted on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2022 were: *Cuphophyllus pratensis* Meadow Waxcap, *Cuphophyllus virgineus* Snowy Waxcap, *Cuphophyllus flavipes* Yellow Foot Waxcap, *Hygrocybe coccinea* Scarlet Waxcap, *H. quieta* Oily Waxcap, *H. reidii* Honey Waxcap, *Neohygrocybe ovina* Blushing Waxcap (a rarity), *Gliophorus irrigatus* Slimy

Waxcap (the drying wind made this very sticky!), *Porpolomopsis calyptryformis* Pink Waxcap (often called the ballerina), and a yellow one (!) – probably *H. chlorophana* Golden Waxcap.

We also recognised 7 other grassland fungi: *Clavaria fragilis* White Spindles, *Clavaria fumosa* Smoky Spindles, *Clavaria acuta* Pointed Club, *Clavulinopsis* sp. a pale yellow Club Fungus, *Ramariopsis* sp. (c.f. *kunzei* or possibly *robusta*) White Coral, *Entoloma* spp. Pinkgills, and *Laccaria laccata* The Deceiver under the canopy of an oak tree.



Thank you to all the eyes and brains, this was a better list than I had found two days previously!

As expected, given the perennial nature of the waxcap mycelium in the ground, the fruiting bodies of the different species at 2 Ty'n y Clawdd appear in the same areas each year. There is a difference between assemblages in each of the five fields, though *C. pratensis* appears in all. One field (also poor in diversity of non-grass plants) has had no waxcaps evident in the last 20 years until this year, when *C. virgineus* was recorded; this species is understood to be a pioneer. This field tends to grow more lush grass and more deep-rooted species such as dock; it has probably been more disturbed and nutrient enriched than the other fields, as this is where the cattle feed troughs have been sited. Waxcaps are known to be sensitive to disturbance such as ploughing and to nitrogen enrichment of the soil – but they can and do return slowly when conditions suit. James Robertson's article 'Nature and Human Succession' in the North Wales Habitats & Meadows Network Newsletter December 2021 re-read and re-appreciated here!

Previous communications from Kate have given us links to talks and papers about waxcaps. Two more which are quick reads with good illustrations and links to more detailed information are: [Grasslands and CHEGD Fungi | CIEEM](#) (a 2021 article by Penny Anderson) and [Waxcaps and Grassland Fungi - Scythe Cymru](#) (a nice piece in their most recent newsletter).

**Sian Turner**

**We started moth trapping back in 2008** after going along to one of the regular monthly moth-ers union meetings at Pensychnant. This proved to be the first of many! As a result of that visit, we borrowed a battery powered light trap and pretty much

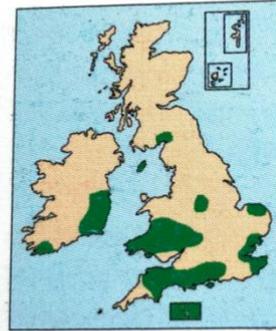


got hooked. We've trapped regularly ever since and have now recorded around 500 moth species.

But at that first-time trapping at the beginning of August, 15 years ago, when we struggled to identify the

### Cloaked Carpet

*Euphyia biangulata* (Nb)



Field speci most dark forew tooth into a Sharp

banded Carpet. However, of forewing, like a growtl moth. Hindwing pale bro

many and varied species, one that really stood out was the **Cloaked Carpet**. All the other moths that we identified were either 'common' or, slightly more interestingly, 'local'. But this one was 'Nb' (Nationally Scarce B (recorded in 31 - 100



10km squares since 1980) but, according to the little map in our id book, didn't seem to be recorded in North Wales at all! In fact, there had been a few records - as it happens mostly at Pensychnant c/o Julian. However, we did wonder what made our patch of habitat attractive to this particular species. On finding that its larval foodplants are Stitchworts, and knowing we had Greater Stitchwort growing in our wooded area we have ever since made it our business to conserve and indeed facilitate its spread. This model of linking identified invertebrates with preferred habitat has influenced the management of our plot over the years.

To complete the story - ever since that first encounter, we have looked forward each year to emergence of our beloved Cloaked Carpet - seen either resting in an egg box in our light trap or maybe spotted sunning itself during the day! It's certainly still with us and was recorded yet again in 2022!

**Jill Tattershall & Mark Sheridan, Mount Green**

## Rapid Grassland Assessment

On the 5<sup>th</sup> of August, a group met in our meadow at **Tyn Llidiart, Nannerch** to learn a technique devised by **Plantlife** to evaluate and monitor the health of grassland.



For the last three years **Lucia Chmurova** has been leading the Magnificent Meadows project which is designed to bring together and help people who wish to establish an area of grassland rich in native species. Unimproved grassland is a rare commodity in Britain.

Lucia eloquently explained the threefold benefits of monitoring which records:

Changes over time

Abundance of key species

Habitat characteristics



## **Protocol**

A survey can be undertaken every one, two or three years. Quadrats of 1 metre square are taken in twenty different locations across the site which you are evaluating. Entries are recorded on a template with a list of key plant species. These evaluations are best undertaken from June to July when the majority of species are flowering.

The results can be expressed numerically or graphically and provide a neat system of comparing data. Unfortunately funding for the 3-year project ceased in December 2022 but hopefully the support delivered by Plantlife has established a network which will continue.

Details of the Rapid Grassland Assessment are explained in the attached YouTube link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-dyrzc-tMI&list=PLbwhrNerrP5Qg1IEb6jSMq2H56Wzc2CBI&index=7&t=3220s>

**Tim & Carys Biddle**

## **Twenty Years of a Wildlife Diary**

I've been keeping a detailed wildlife diary for more than 20 years, a record of constant change and discovery. Every year there are new records or rediscoveries - this year these included a new tetrad for Black Spleenwort and the welcome rediscovery of Mother Shipton moth. Early Purple Orchids have been increasing where I introduced winter grazing into woodland 10 years ago - 172 flowering plants this year, where there used to be only a handful. The spread of Betony in an old meadow would lend itself to time-lapse photography - a clump has fragmented but spread. You only start to see this picture over a number of years. Each year is different and full of surprises.

**James Robertson**

## **30 YEARS FROM NOWT - TO A MAJOR AWARD!**

*(Or how to get more people involved in saving biodiversity)*

In October 1986 we bought an 8-acre smallholding in Northeast Wales so we could start a wildflower meadow. I joined Butterfly Conservation and the North Wales Wildlife Trust, from whom I got a lot of helpful advice. As a volunteer I gave talks to local gardening clubs and went into schools to help them grow wildlife plants in school grounds. This raised money from small fees as well as from selling the plants I had produced from my own unimproved meadow seed and my garden. These funds were useful for the local branch of Butterfly Conservation when I was organising volunteer work on a new reserve, Eyrarth Rocks near Ruthin, and recruiting new members. I also wrote articles in local newsletters and newspapers about wildlife that I observed on our land and how I tried to manage the habitats accordingly. In 2005 I published a collection of these articles, called 'A Country Diary for North Wales'. This was partly to get to know my way round the publishing industry so that I could self-publish a much bigger book with lots of colour photos, many of which were kindly donated by friends I had made in NWWT and Butterfly Conservation. This I did in 2010, a book entitled 'Gardening for Butterflies, bees and other beneficial insects' which has sold nearly 3,000 copies in 10 years. Sales were boosted by the arrival of the Varoa mite, as the national media were alerted to the die-out of pollinators. Through this I became a member of the Garden Media Guild and a Trustee, conference organiser, website page and Blog writer for the Wildlife Gardening Forum from 2009. These are both based in London and hence draw in many more media people. I also applied for and finally obtained Plant Heritage National Collection status for my collection of Eupatorium (Hemp Agrimonies) around 2004. This seems to have got me noticed by TV and radio stations when looking for unusual plants to talk about. (Maybe Plantlife could start their own scheme for National Collections of wild plants?)

I also started my own website with info, sales and blogs about my various biodiversity projects ([www.7wells.co.uk](http://www.7wells.co.uk)). This is essential so people can find out about what you are doing, and it also can raise funds for your projects and charities. I became a volunteer member of the Welsh Government Pollinator Task force on behalf of NWWT and wrote the recommended plant list for them. This put me in touch with more influential people. I tried for many years to get my writing into mainstream gardening magazines, without much success, although recently asked by the Guardian to write for their Country Diary.

I also tried for many years to get my garden into the National Garden Scheme of private gardens open to the public, initially without success. The county lady who co-ordinated the open gardens list visited and asked '*Well, how long do you think it would take you to get it under control? Because we do get complaints, you know!*' I finally managed to get into their Yellow Book (so good for publicity) for the 2020 season. It was going to be an open weekend with lots of local naturalist colleagues I had got to know from all the different wonderful volunteer groups, with tables around the garden having trays,

microscopes, ID charts and different creatures and plants collected by them from my land in the previous days - moths, pond life, beetles from fall traps and rotting logs etc. etc. It was going to be wonderful - but then of course we all know what happened in 2020!

But I have been able to open to small groups arranged in advance, not able to have all the specialists there at the same time though. Then, miraculously, after years of 1000s of people like all of us banging on about it, the winner of the best in show at The Chelsea Flower Show was a wildlife garden – complete with beaver dam! There is now huge public interest in wildlife gardening. This is a huge industry and one we should be maximising our efforts on. If you have a child (or even grandchild!) who is competent online with websites and social media, they could help you with this very important way of getting new ideas out to young people.

On 25th November 2022 we received a national Garden Media Guild award for the BBC Gardeners' World wildlife gardening special, based on a visit to my garden and fields (episode 25, sadly broadcast the day after the Queen died, but still available on iPlayer).

Why is this important to us? Because it is a huge change from the crackpot label people like me (and you too?) had in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. It is changing the way governments act and fund biodiversity conservation around the world.



This is a brief rundown on how I have personally done my small part in getting more public interest in the importance of conserving biodiversity, but it was a long hard slog over 35 years that had a lot of knockbacks, and continues to do so, including being told at the GMG awards dinner that I was not to

receive the award myself, but it would be given to the famous BBC presenters, who had spent half a day at my place. I was however invited by the producers to tell the presenters what to say! The producers and cameramen did most of the work, but the BBC would not allow me to nominate them... Now I am nearly 70 and don't have the energy to do so much. But I hope it gives you all encouragement to keep beavering on and plugging the message! I have never been trained as a writer (other than an online course on writing magazine articles in 1999, but that was before the internet really took off), nor as an ecologist or publicist. Anyone could do what I have done, or at least some bits of it!! If you would like to have more information about contacts, societies, how to publish and advertise your own books or pamphlets and articles please do contact me on [jan@7wells.org](mailto:jan@7wells.org). And maybe I could do a workshop for our group on it all.

**Jan Miller-Klein**

**Cofnod** is your Local Environmental Records Centre that brings together wildlife data from across North Wales. Wildlife records increase knowledge of our environment enabling more informed decisions to be made about its conservation.



Their Online Recording System (**ORS**) has been upgraded.

Find it here if you're not already using it - <https://cofnod-ors.lerc.online/Login?ReturnUrl=%2F>



## Landmark COP15 agreement gives nature hope for the future

<https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/blog/lucy-pegg/cop15-agreement-hope>

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/about-us/news/cop-15-concludes-plantlife-ceo-reaction>



Recordings of monthly discussions hosted by Craig Bennett – CEO of the trust.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLmcvoyrpGm8PhE3fOYcy3m49l0HcgfJwH>



An excellent website and well worth joining. If you missed their virtual conference a recording will be posted on the site soon.

<http://www.wlhf.org/>



Plantlife Library – for hard-hitting reports and guides for the amateur botanist.

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/publications>



## RHS Companion to Wildlife Gardening

By Chris Baines

16<sup>th</sup> February 2023 | Frances Lincoln | £25.00 | Hardback

Fully revised and updated by the author, this is the perennial and comprehensive guide to the art of wildlife gardening from the RHS, freshly illustrated and bursting with new ideas and projects.



A Wild Space is one where butterflies and moths can complete their lifecycles. The area needs to enable them to feed, breed and shelter. There is no defined size, so long as the requirements are met – it is a Wild Space.

**To find out more and maybe register your wild space**

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/wild-spaces>