



Wild  
Meadows



flora  
LOCALE



The Grasslands  
Trust

for wildlife and people



wild  
about  
meadows

A MANIFESTO FOR THE WILD MEADOWS OF WALES





BBC Wales

I HAVE MANY FOND MEMORIES of my childhood growing up in Llanwddyn in north Montgomeryshire. Climbing trees, racing bikes through the wood, swimming in the river Vyrnwy, long walks on the moorland, watching Water Voles as I fished of an evening; it's a long, long list. However, one memory remains more vivid in my mind than all the others.

I'm walking through a meadow with my brother Rhys, on our way to meet a friend on a local farm. As we make our way through the knee-high grasses, dozens of grasshoppers jump to avoid our clumsy feet. A Curlew rises from the far end of the field, an area it has used every year to raise its brood. In the wetter areas, the pink heads of Ragged Robin swing with the breeze and Oxeye Daisies carpet the ground all around us. As we approach a broad, wooden gate, I point out a cluster of Bee Orchids, well hidden despite their bright flowers.

All around us, butterflies, burnet moths, bees and beetles fly to and fro from flower to flower and dozens of swallows and House Martins swoop down, mouth agape, to scoop up any unsuspecting insect.

This meadow was not a Site of Special Scientific Interest or a nature reserve, it was just an ordinary field. There were plenty more all along the river valley and, I suspect, all over the country.

I visited the same field last summer. The orchids, butterflies, swallows, Curlew, Ragged Robin and Oxeye Daisies had all gone. It was wall-to-wall Rye-grass with hardly a dandelion or daisy to break the monotonous green carpet. I nearly wept.

Unfortunately, this is an all too common tale. Over 98% of our wildflower grasslands have disappeared in the past 60 years and a fantastic array of wildlife has gone with them. Of the few that remain, some are protected by law, others because they are managed by sympathetic landowners but, even as I write, many will be disappearing forever.

The wildflower meadow – Wild Meadow – is an icon of the British countryside, an integral part of many a childhood. I hate to think that my children and grandchildren may never have the opportunity to walk through a field full of singing Skylarks and buzzing bees. We must act now to save these wonderful wildlife habitats.

**Iolo Williams**

TV presenter and Patron, The Wild Meadows Initiative for Wales

We define Wild Meadows as all types of grasslands full of wild flowers, with abundant insect life that provides a fundamental life-support system for birds and other wild animals. They are among Britain's most threatened wildlife habitats.

**Wild Meadows is an initiative led by Flora locale, the wild-plant restoration charity, working in partnership with farmers and conservation organisations, to promote the restoration, good management and appreciation of wildflower grasslands.**

**To find out more about Wild Meadows go to [www.wildmeadows.org.uk](http://www.wildmeadows.org.uk)**

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Cover: Sue Everett, David Harries, David Kjaer and National Trust for Wales.

# Summary

**The purpose of this Manifesto, published by Flora locale and The Grasslands Trust, is to develop an agenda, which all those who care about Wild Meadows can unite behind. There are many other places, such as those described by our Patron in his Foreword, that desperately need our help. They have so much to offer, from aesthetic delights to wider environmental and economic benefits. Let us all work together to restore and maintain Wild Meadows to the living and working landscape of Wales.**

- ❁ Wild Meadows and their management needs are generally not well understood or sufficiently valued among the farming and landowning community. They, and the people that can and do maintain the surviving examples, are a major asset to sustainable farming and the biodiversity of Wales.
- ❁ These grasslands could play a greater role in adding value to agricultural produce and as a resource for countryside tourism. Promotional campaigns to market Welsh beef and lamb from wildflower-rich grasslands would add value to Welsh produce and increase the value of Wild Meadows to the farming industry.
- ❁ Many Wild Meadows are legally protected as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) but four in every five of these are in an unfavourable condition; greater resources are urgently needed to secure appropriate management for these grasslands, to afford legal protection and secure appropriate management to others that are of similar quality.
- ❁ Local Wildlife Site status can be applied to Wild Meadows that are not designated as nationally important sites (SSSI). A comprehensive Local Wildlife Sites system, to replace the current *ad hoc* and often poorly resourced and supported arrangements, could play a major part in protecting many locally distinctive and important Wild Meadows and other wildlife habitats.
- ❁ Greater resources are needed to help farmers and landowners manage their Wild Meadows effectively. For example, the current review of agri-environment schemes offers a vital opportunity to improve support for maintaining and restoring Wild Meadows.
- ❁ More needs to be done to stop Wild Meadows from being lost to development and intensive farming.
- ❁ Locally-developed special projects, that provide advice and support for Wild Meadow management and restoration, work well and need to be developed more widely. Better long-term support is urgently needed to enable local initiatives to be developed and sustained.

**Investment made in protecting and restoring Wild Meadows now will reap benefits for the Welsh economy, heritage and environment. If the measures developed in this document and background papers are fully implemented it should be possible to achieve the aims of *The Environment Strategy for Wales* in relation to Wild Meadows, and for other priority habitats generally.**

Stuart Smith, Countryside Council for Wales



“The landscape of Wales represents a precious and vulnerable resource reflecting biodiversity, geographical variety, historic development and cultural identity.”  
(Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007–2013)

Flora locale



Grassland, and livestock-farming, dominate the lowland landscape of Wales. Scattered within this landscape are fields full of wild flowers and other wild plants that represent the remnants of a formerly extensive network of Wild Meadows maintained by grazing or hay-making, or a combination of both. From marshy fields to flower-filled hay meadows, limestone pastures, upland-fringe fridd and clifftop grasslands, Wild Meadows are a vital part of the Welsh heritage of nature, landscape and traditional farming.



# Manifesto for the Wild Meadows of Wales

## VALUING WILD MEADOWS

Recognise the intrinsic and economic value of wildflower grasslands, the need to protect them from harm and support the people who own or look after them. In particular, recognise the role of these grasslands as part of a sustainable farming and livestock industry and for the wholesome and nutritious food they can produce.

The public, farmers, landowners, developers, local planning authorities, planning consultants, land agents, public bodies, local councillors, Welsh Assembly Government, Nutrition Network for Wales

## SITES OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

Strengthen and improve the focus of the Countryside Council for Wales' role and resources (suitably qualified staff and finance) to protect and restore Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Welsh Assembly Government

Owners and occupiers of Sites of Special Scientific Interest should receive regular visits, advice and support, through habitat-related Management Agreements, agri-environment agreements and other mechanisms, to help them safeguard these special sites.

Countryside Council for Wales

Complete the notification of all outstanding proposed grassland SSSIs and secure appropriate management of them.

Countryside Council for Wales, farmers and landowners

## SUPPORTING OWNERS AND MANAGERS OF WILD MEADOWS

### **Agri-environment schemes**

Introduce a revised, improved and better-funded suite of agri-environment schemes that will provide adequate long-term support for farmers and landowners to maintain, restore and re-establish Wild Meadows across holdings of all sizes. This could be achieved by:

Welsh Assembly Government

- Reintroducing a habitat-focused scheme for Wild Meadows and other Priority Habitats; this needs to be on a part-farm basis, that would also be available to owners with wildflower grasslands who are ineligible to apply for agri-environment schemes;
- Improving the focus of the entry-level scheme, so that it can achieve improved outcomes for biodiversity and environmental protection;
- Increasing payment rates for maintaining and restoring important grassland habitats to a level comparable to commercial grazing rent;
- Improve the quality of compliance-monitoring for species-rich and semi-improved grasslands under agri-environment agreements.

### **Local schemes and general support to owners and managers**

Improve the provision of advice and support for owners and managers to help them secure positive management of their Wild Meadows, and especially those with smallholdings of three hectares or less that are ineligible to apply for agri-environment agreements.

Countryside Council for Wales, Welsh Assembly Government, Local Biodiversity Action Group partners, Flora locale

The funding climate for Special Projects needs to be substantially improved, supported for longer periods with flexible conditions that take into account the needs of the delivery agencies, which may be voluntary organisations.

Welsh Assembly Government and all funders of Special Projects





Special Projects related to Wild Meadows, their survey, conservation and management, need to be positively encouraged through the Rural Development Programme for Wales and, wherever possible, linked to improving training opportunities for land managers and the development of local food networks to market lamb and beef sourced from extensively managed grasslands. Such projects will ultimately deliver wide-ranging benefits to farmers, biodiversity and local communities in Wales.

All heritage organisations, farming businesses, retail networks, tourism organisations, local authorities, Nutrition Network for Wales

### **Sustaining viable livestock farming systems**

Implement preventative and evidence-based solutions for dealing with livestock disease, to ensure the long-term viability of cattle-farming in Wales.

Welsh Assembly Government, Defra, livestock industry

### **LOCAL WILDLIFE SITE NETWORK**

Provide resources, and develop a Wales-wide Wildlife Site Network that identifies and protects all surviving Wild Meadows and other important wildlife habitats that are not designated as SSSI.

Welsh Assembly Government, local planning authorities, Countryside Council for Wales, Wales Biodiversity Partnership, Local Environmental Records Centres

### **DEVELOPMENT CONTROL**

Protect Wild Meadows through the planning process and Environmental Assessment regulations.

Welsh Assembly Government, local planning authorities, Countryside Council for Wales

Provide sufficient resources for the effective operation of Local Environmental Records Centres to enable them to provide up-to-date and accurate data on the location and condition of Wild Meadows, when required for development control purposes.

### **TOURISM AND PUBLIC ENJOYMENT**

Improve opportunities for the public to visit and enjoy Wild Meadows.

Support and develop wildlife tourism in Wales, that includes promoting visits to Wild Meadows and developing farm-based accommodation to support this, especially from May to mid July.

Wales Tourism Alliance, Visit Wales, Countryside Council for Wales, National Trust and other landowners, Wales Biodiversity Partnership

The wildlife of Wales is an important, but rather undeveloped, asset to Welsh tourism. With support from the tourist industry and the Welsh Assembly Government, wildlife and heritage organisations in association with rural business and landowners, should work together to sustainably develop this aspect of tourism in Wales.

### **LAND PURCHASE**

Support the acquisition of threatened grasslands as a measure of last resort.

Welsh Assembly Government, Countryside Council for Wales, funders, wildlife and heritage organisations in Wales



# Wild meadows ...

## ...are grasslands rich in wild flowers, grasses, rushes and sedges

Their distinctive wild-plant communities are adapted to the local climate, soil and land management – between 15 and 40 wild plant species can occur in a single square metre and, in the best examples, 60 or more grassland plants can be found in one field. This diversity provides food and shelter for many other species including grassland fungi, bugs, butterflies, birds, frogs and toads, Grass Snakes, hedgehogs and other small mammals.

## ... can buffer towns and villages from flooding

Wild Meadows and other extensively-managed grasslands in river valleys protect nearby towns and villages by absorbing floodwater. Across Britain, most natural floodplain grasslands have been drained or built upon, while many are heavily grazed, factors that increase the rate at which rainfall and floodwater enters rivers.

## ... protect water supplies

Wild Meadows are free from the use of pesticides, livestock slurry and artificial fertilisers. Fertiliser, if used, is in the form of farmyard manure, which is recycled by the plants present. Improved agricultural grasslands are dependent on sustained use of artificial fertilisers or slurry, which can pollute Welsh rivers and streams and

damages wildflower grasslands and other nearby habitats, such as hedgerows.

## ... where wild flowers and slow food grow

Wild Meadows are a valuable agricultural resource that can produce tasty and nutritious 'slow' food, such as beef, lamb, milk and cheese.

### EATING BIODIVERSITY

Recent research indicates that meat from unimproved land supporting wild flowers and wild grasses not only tastes good, it contains higher levels of Vitamin E and 'good' fatty acids, than meat raised on heavily fertilised improved grassland dominated by Rye-grass. The Eating Biodiversity Project\* found that the Vitamin E content of lamb grazed on saltmarshes and heather moors was significantly higher than for animals grazed on flower-poor Rye-grass pastures. It was also higher in Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids and lower in the less-healthy 'trans' fats. The lamb also has a longer shelf life – a feature of considerable economic value to butchers and supermarkets.

\*Universities of Bristol, Exeter, Gloucestershire and Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research



Stuart Smith, Countryside Council for Wales

Wild Meadows are agricultural habitats – shaped by many centuries of grazing by cattle, ponies or sheep. Grazing, or grazing and hay-making, are vital to maintain the diverse flora of Wild Meadows and to prevent the growth of tussocky vegetation, scrub and trees



Charles Morgan, PONT

The mixture of wild herbs and grasses eaten by the cattle raised by May Organic Farms is reflected in the rich, complex taste of the meat.



Eyebright and Ribwort Plantain are two grassland wild flowers with medicinal properties that are used to make traditional medicines for treating sick animals with eye infections or worms.

### ... are places to breathe in and enjoy

Experience proves that people love to visit Wild Meadows. Every year in the Wye Valley, the Monmouthshire Meadows Group hold an Open Meadows day similar to the open gardens scheme. Over 150 people visited the wildflower meadows that were opened in 2007.

### ... are naturally good for native-breed sheep, cattle and ponies

Wild Meadows are rich in wild herbs, high in fibre and low in sugar – the ideal diet for horses and ponies, especially native breeds. Because of their abundant wild herbs, many of which are deep rooted and able to bring important trace elements up from deep in the soil, Wild Meadows have traditionally been called 'medicine' or 'hospital' pastures (*Caeau ysbyty*) and were sometimes used for grazing sick animals to help them recover.

### ... are green lungs in town

Meadows on the edge of and within towns are greatly threatened by building, often seen as 'waste' land ripe for development. However, they are also important 'green lungs', providing breathing spaces for people to enjoy, and breaking up the monotony of housing estates and business parks. Urban grasslands are often damp or low-lying; development on them may increase flood risk to houses and businesses.

Bob Gibbons



Eyebright

Gwent Wildlife Trust



Bob Gibbons



Ribwort Plantain

Paula Graham





### Lowland hay meadows

This type of wildflower grassland is one of Britain's most threatened habitats but would have covered much of the Welsh lowlands before the Second World War, especially on fertile soils of river valleys and gently sloping ground. Since this time the majority of lowland grasslands have been ploughed and drained to grow arable crops or re-sown with commercial grass varieties, heavily fertilised and their productivity improved to enable more cattle or sheep to be kept. Making hay has also largely gone out of fashion. Many former hay meadows are now cut for silage, which is heavily dependent on maintaining high fertility. Silage making involves cutting and baling fresh grass often twice a year, starting with a first cut as early as April or May, at a time when grassland birds would normally nest.

# Types of Wild Meadows in Wales

WILD MEADOWS (usually referred to by scientists as unimproved, species-rich or herb-rich grasslands) can be very different from place to place, holding different combinations of wild plants.

### Inland

- ✿ Grazing marshes on river floodplains
- ✿ Hay meadows in river valleys and on level or gently sloping ground
- ✿ Pastures on 'neutral' (neither lime rich or acid) soils that dry out in summer
- ✿ Purple moor-grass and rush pastures on wet ground ('Rhos' Pasture)
- ✿ Species-rich grassland on acid soils in the lowlands
- ✿ Pastures on lime-rich soils; in Wales these are usually on limestone

### Along the coast

- ✿ Grazing marshes beside estuaries
- ✿ Established grassland on sand dunes
- ✿ Grasslands on sea cliffs and their slopes.

A survey, completed in 2003, revealed that the Curlew, a ground-nesting bird of hay meadows, is threatened with extinction in lowland Wales. Since 1989, Curlews have declined by 80% in Wales, along with their wet grassland habitat. Lapwing, Snipe and Redshank have experienced similar steep declines.



David Tipling, RSPB

Curlew



Gwent Wildlife Trust



Gwent Wildlife Trust

*Traditional haymaking is vital for the survival of hay meadow wildlife*



Floral ocale



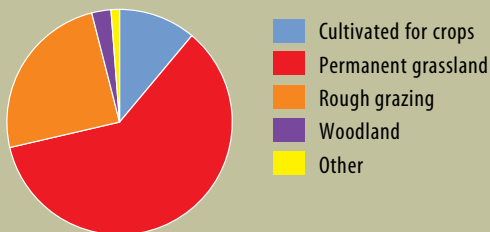
# Extent of Wild Meadows in Wales

NINETY-SIX PER CENT of farmland in Wales is grazed by livestock (mainly cattle and sheep), horses and ponies. This includes moorland and rough grazing land in the uplands, as well as lowland grassland, bogs and other grazed habitats. At the best estimate, species-rich grasslands inland, in the lowlands and on the upland fringe, make up less than 3.3% of the entire agricultural area, and only around 3.5% of all the grazing land in Wales.

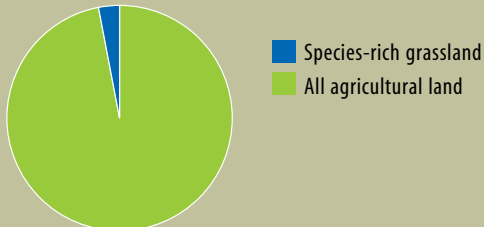
Wild Meadows are endangered and increasingly scarce. Lowland wildflower hay meadows and pastures mostly remain as small, isolated fragments surrounded by intensively farmed land, and are often associated with smallholdings that are not part of commercial farming enterprises. In many locations they are often subject to overly heavy grazing that suppresses wild flowers. On the coast, in the clifftop locations where wildflower grasslands remain, they literally 'cling' to the cliff edge as narrow strips beside the coastal path. Everywhere, Wild Meadows are still being lost, especially to agricultural improvement, changes in grazing management and building. Abandonment of grazing is an increasing problem, as it is in other parts of Europe, due to an ageing farming population and a decline of traditional livestock farming in marginal areas.

**Wild Meadows make up less than 3.3% of the Welsh countryside, or less than 3% of the land area of Wales if developed land in villages, towns and cities is included. This Manifesto puts the case for urgent action, to conserve and expand this resource. Existing targets to expand this area are very modest. We propose that Wild Meadows should cover 5% of the countryside by 2015.**

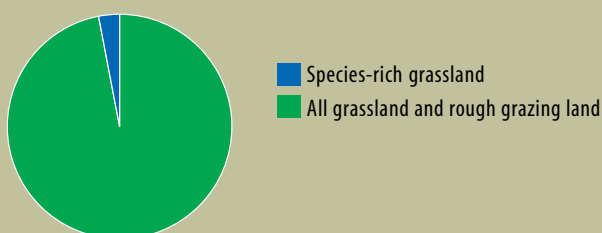
Agricultural land use in Wales



Area of species-rich grassland compared to all agricultural land



Area of species-rich grassland compared to all grassland and rough grazing land



Area of species-rich grassland in Wales by type<sup>1</sup>

Grassland type	Area (ha)
Species rich unimproved acid grassland on the upland margins	17,560
Upland limestone grassland	700
Rhos pasture	32,161
Lowland hay meadows and pastures (on neutral soils)	1,322
Lowland limestone grassland	1,146
Species rich lowland acid grassland	610
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>53,499</b>

<sup>1</sup> Source: Countryside Council for Wales. Excludes data for species-rich grassland associated with sand dunes.





# Where are Wild Meadows found?

MOST OF THE EXTENSIVE EXAMPLES are 'mosaic' habitats of small unimproved pastures, hay meadows and rushy fields on the upland fringe – on land that has traditionally been the most difficult to farm. Surviving examples of the once most commonplace type of Wild Meadow, lowland hay meadows and pastures on neutral soils, are thinly spread across Wales. Pembrokeshire (30%), Glamorgan (14%) and Carmarthenshire (10%) are strongholds. Most of those remaining occur as rather small, isolated fields or groups of fields, often smaller than a hectare in size. Sites with other forms of unimproved grassland are seldom more than a few hectares in size.

Rushy (Rhos) pastures, are also spread across Wales, with most surviving in Carmarthenshire (19%), Glamorgan (16%), Ceredigion (12%) and Snowdonia (11%). The majority of limestone grassland in lowland Wales occurs on sea cliffs in south-West Wales and Conwy, with significant areas under public or National Trust ownership. Elsewhere, the Brecon Beacons National Park has nearly three-quarters (72%) of Wales' upland calcareous grasslands, while over half the surviving wildflower-rich lowland acid grassland in Wales is found in Snowdonia, Gwynedd and Powys.

*In some areas, road verges provide the last refuges for grassland wild flowers*

**In the lowlands, many of the remaining Wild Meadows are tiny fields, often isolated by large areas of wildlife-poor improved grasslands or cultivated land**





# Threats to Wild Meadows of Wales

## Intensification of agriculture

Conversion to intensively managed grassland – use of artificial fertiliser and weed-killers, ploughing, re-seeding, slurry application, drainage; shift from hay to silage production; shift from traditional cattle breeds to those developed for intensive beef or dairy farming.

## Overstocking

Grazing too many animals for too long and at inappropriate times, and winter-feeding on pastures, leads to changes in the grassland vegetation, notably the loss of wild flowers, increases in White Clover and undesirable weeds such as Creeping Buttercup, dock or thistle.

## Abandonment of farming

Under-grazing leads to replacement of Wild Meadow flora by tussocky grassland, bracken or scrub. Abandonment often occurs after fields are sold, and if new owners have little experience of farming, no livestock or equipment, or if they lack an understanding of Wild Meadows and their management.

## Livestock disease

Restrictions on the movement of cattle, due to Bovine TB and Bluetongue, is undermining the viability of livestock businesses and threatens the ability of farmers to manage their grasslands sustainably.

## Other land use changes

Tree planting, development by houses, business parks, quarrying, landfill sites, roads. Conversion to pony or horse paddocks, that are overstocked or poorly managed is a particular issue on the fringe of towns and cities.

## Improved and intensively-managed grasslands

Grassland is arguably the most important agricultural resource of Wales. The majority of lowland grassland is intensively managed ('improved'), to maximise the production of meat and milk, products for which Wales is famous the world over. Intensively managed grasslands usually consist of a few fast-growing grass species that have been sown, especially Perennial Rye-grass, and commercial varieties of clovers. They contain very few native wild flowers. Maintaining high productivity depends on regular application of fertilisers in the form of slurry, inorganic fertiliser or high volumes of farmyard manure, sometimes coupled with routine spraying of weedkillers to eradicate unwanted wild flowers such as buttercups. Many improved grasslands are cut at least twice for silage, with the first early cut in April or May. On ground that is difficult to plough, wild grasses, such as Crested Dog's-tail, bents and fescues predominate. Productivity on these grasslands is also maintained by using fertilisers and, in some cases, broad-leaved weedkillers.

Sue Everett

*Overgrazing often leads to nutrient enrichment, the growth of weeds, indiscriminate use of weedkillers and loss of wild flowers*

Sue Everett

*Abandonment of grazing is currently a major threat to Wild Meadows*

Gwent Wildlife Trust

*Wild flowers are absent from intensively managed grassland, which is also poor for other wildlife*

Stuart Smith, Countryside Council for Wales



# Current mechanisms for protecting and restoring Wild Meadows

## The framework

The *Environment Strategy for Wales* sets the overall framework and commitments for maintaining and restoring biodiversity and the rural environment of Wales. Within this the Wales Biodiversity Partnership leads the nationwide scheme of regionally administered Local Biodiversity Action Plans that have targets for maintaining and restoring Wild Meadow habitats. Representatives from local and central government, wildlife conservation charities, farming organisations and landowners, are involved in these initiatives. Species-rich grasslands have been singled out as priority habitats by the Welsh Assembly Government under Section 42 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

## Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

The Countryside Council of Wales (CCW) is the official government agency responsible for designating the very best Wild Meadows as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Designating an SSSI confers a degree of legal protection for a site, with the aim of ensuring its important features and habitats are maintained. CCW can also assist SSSI owners and managers through management agreements, although there is currently an increasing reliance on using Tir Gofal for this purpose (even though it is unavailable to many Wild Meadow owners).

To date, the SSSI system for protecting Wales' most important Wild Meadows has largely failed – a review of the condition

of SSSI in Wales carried out between 2005 and 2006 by the Countryside Council for Wales found that four-fifths of SSSI's designated for their grassland interest was in an unfavourable condition due to abandonment or under-management and, in some cases, due to intensification of agriculture. Following grassland surveys between 10 and 20 years ago, many more important grassland sites deserving legal protection should have been notified as SSSI but remain unprotected. The *Environment Strategy for Wales* sets a target for achieving favourable condition on 95% of SSSI by 2015, a target that will be challenging to achieve.

*Only one in five Wild Meadow SSSI in Wales are in a favourable condition*

## Locally designated sites

For every one species-rich grassland designated as an SSSI there are many more of similar size and quality that have no legal protection. Local Wildlife Site status should be applied to Wild Meadows that are of local importance, and in some cases even of SSSI quality, providing a system exists in that Local Planning Authority area. This would at least 'flag' the site as being of wildlife importance through the development control process. Identifying Local Wildlife Sites can also provide an avenue to help their owners obtain management advice or other support, including practical help with grazing and hay-making, and advice about financial assistance to help them

positively manage these important habitats. Wales currently has an incomplete Local Site network, with some Local Authorities running poorly resourced systems and others led by the Local Wildlife Trust.

## Agri-environment schemes

Good management of Wild Meadows relies on maintaining traditional livestock farming, that includes grazing at appropriate times of the year and ensuring suitable stocking rates, or hay-making and aftermath grazing. However, farm incomes in Wales are being squeezed, and farmers will often need financial support to carry on using traditional farming methods to maintain Wild Meadows, practices which may not be appropriate to the rest of their holding. Currently, the Welsh Assembly Government is relying on the agri-environment schemes, particularly Tir Gofal, to provide this support.

Agri-environment schemes offer vital income to some farmers and landowners in Wales. However, their potential to secure long-term maintenance or restoration of wild meadows is limited for a number of reasons. These limitations, along with proposals for improving the schemes, are detailed in an accompanying document – *Wales Agri-environment Schemes and Wild Meadows*.

The current review of agri-environment schemes, being undertaken by the Welsh Assembly Government, provides a vital opportunity to re-focus and improve the support available to protect, maintain and restore Wild Meadows.



## Condition of grassland SSSIs

Grassland type	Percent favourable
Acid	22%
Calcareous	20%
Neutral	19%

Source: *Sites of Special Scientific Interest in Wales. Current State and Knowledge. Report for April 2005–April 2006. Countryside Council for Wales.*



A substantial number of smallholdings are ineligible to apply for the agri-environment schemes because they are under the 3-ha threshold, or their holdings have not been registered. The Shared Earth Trust has estimated that between 10 and 17 percent of rural land in Wales is held by unregistered smallholdings. Evidence also suggests that the majority of remaining wildflower grasslands in Wales are associated with this type of holding.

### Special projects delivering local action

Special projects are mostly local initiatives, developed by one or more organisation using funds from a range of sources. They are a particularly important means of providing support to owners of smallholdings under 3ha in size. Special environmental projects can result in significant added value, such as benefits to a local community, education, trade and tourism. Funding for special projects is usually time-limited (often three years), difficult and time-consuming to obtain, with grant paid retrospectively. Coupled with the short-term nature of most special projects, and difficulties in obtaining match-funding, this can create cash-flow difficulties for wildlife charities, as well as problems with staff recruitment to run projects and retention of people with relevant skills and experience.

*“ We seek to value and improve the biodiversity and quality of our environment not only for its own sake, but also as an essential part of delivering a sustainable future for local economies and communities. ”*

(Wales: A Better Country – The Strategic Agenda of the Welsh Assembly Government, 2003)

### Development control

Quarrying, building houses or industrial parks or roads, are significant threats to Wild Meadows, especially on the urban fringe and in south Wales. Although most local planning authorities have policies to protect important wildlife habitats and the countryside, these are often dismissed in favour of development. Sometimes it is assumed that important grasslands can be moved (relocated) somewhere else – an activity which has rarely proved successful. The lack of comprehensive data on the location of remaining Wild Meadows also means that potentially important sites can be earmarked for development and are at risk from being permanently lost. This underlines the need for supporting the establishment of a comprehensive Local Wildlife Sites System for each Local Authority area and an effective network of Local Environmental Records Centres. This would enable developers and decision-makers to be provided with adequate information about the wildlife value of a site before it is proposed for development.

### Environmental assessment regulations

Theoretically, The Environmental Impact Assessment (Agriculture) (Wales) Regulations can prevent wildlife-rich grasslands from being destroyed through agricultural improvement. In a few cases these have been effective at stopping important grasslands from being destroyed, providing they were identified by surveys of the 1990s. In other cases the EIA regulations were ignored and no action taken against the landowners

involved. Since 2006 the requirements of the Regulations are part of cross-compliance (see below).

### Agricultural cross-compliance

Those receiving Single Farm and other agricultural payments under the Common Agricultural Policy are required to keep agricultural land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition. The requirements include some measures that can theoretically help protect unimproved grassland from damage. This means that if a farm undergoes compliance monitoring and one of these conditions is not met, there is a risk that payments can be withheld. In practice this rarely happens, while some of the measurements for monitoring grassland condition are inappropriate for measuring whether species-rich grasslands are being maintained in a healthy condition. Moreover, compliance monitoring may be carried out by surveyors with no skills in grassland survey and who have no baseline ecological data from which to work.

*“ We must deliver high quality places for people to live. This means a high quality built environment and opportunities to access green space and biodiversity. ”*

Environment Strategy for Wales



*Grazing is vital for the survival of Wild Meadows. Free demonstration events for owners and managers are held each Spring and Summer by Flora locale and other organisations in Wales. For details see [www.wildmeadows.org.uk](http://www.wildmeadows.org.uk)*





Site Everett

# Special Projects supporting Wild Meadow restoration in Wales

## **The National Trust for Wales Hay Meadows project**

Under the Hay Meadows Project for Wales, the Trust is ensuring that all its existing meadows on the land it manages in hand are well managed. It is working towards increasing its hay meadow resource by supporting farming tenants to make hay and, where appropriate, to introduce seed from species-rich meadows.



Pembrokeshire Coast National Park

## **Carmel grasslands**

Managing Carmel National Nature Reserve, The Grasslands Trust is restoring the exceptional grasslands within this internationally important mosaic of grasslands and ancient woodland, buying land to buffer and link different parts of the Reserve, and working with local farmers to restore wildflower grasslands as part of a wider landscape-scale project.

## **Pembrokeshire National Park coastal grasslands**

### **Conserving the Coastal Slopes**

The National Park's coastal management scheme helps owners unable or unwilling to enter whole-farm agri-environment schemes by providing top-up grants, management agreements, stock-sourcing and other practical assistance to support the reintroduction of grazing on wildflower-rich coastal grasslands.



Charles Morgan, PONT

## **PONT: Pori Natur a Threftadaeth (the Welsh arm of the UK Grazing Animals Project)**

PONT works with landowners and stock managers in Wales to achieve suitable grazing management for the benefit of the wildlife and landscape of Wales.

## **Mynydd Mawr Marsh Fritillary Project, Carmarthenshire**

Butterfly Conservation's project aims to ensure the survival of an important population of Marsh Fritillary butterflies in south-west Wales, by working with landowners to support extensive grazing of marshy fields in areas where the butterfly occurs.



Carol Carter

## **Gwent Grasslands Initiative (Monmouthshire, Blaenau Gwent)**

The Gwent Wildlife Trust's project has identified important grasslands and worked with over 300 landowners, providing management advice and information and designating some of the most important meadows as Local Wildlife Sites. Some owners have opened their meadows for local people to visit, while local community groups and churches have also been involved.



# Bringing back the Wild Meadows of Wales

Seed from surviving Wild Meadows is now being collected and used to restore wild flowers to flower-poor improved grasslands. For further information contact the Wild Meadows (Wales) Project Officer or see [www.wildmeadows.org.uk](http://www.wildmeadows.org.uk).



*Cutting and baling seed-rich hay*



*Seed collected using a brush harvester.*

Sue Everett



*Spreading chopped seed-rich hay*

R. Pywell, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology



Gwent Wildlife Trust



## Tourism

The Welsh countryside sustains a vital tourism industry, that makes a significant economic contribution to Welsh rural communities as a major source of employment. Rural tourism is worth around £350 million to rural communities per annum. However, tourism based on watching wildlife in Wales has hardly been developed, despite the huge opportunities available, especially in the early season of May to mid-July, when many Wild Meadows are at their most colourful and bed-spaces are not fully occupied. Wild Meadows offer a wonderful resource, offering an ideal opportunity to increase public enjoyment of the countryside and appreciation of wildlife in Wales.



Sue Everett



# Flora locale's Wild Meadows Initiative for Wales

**This aims to:**

- ✿ **Raise awareness and increase public support for this threatened habitat**
- ✿ **Improve collaboration between farming and conservation groups in Wales for the benefit of Wild Meadows**
- ✿ **Encourage and support farmers and other landowners to restore and manage their Wild Meadows appropriately by:**
  - 1. Seeking increased government support to help farmers and other landowners protect and restore Wild Meadows, through agri-environment and other schemes**
  - 2. Providing training and demonstration events for landowners, advisers and managers**
  - 3. Networking Wild Meadow owners and managers**
  - 4. Developing a website providing information about Wild Meadows and their management**
  - 5. Supporting farm diversification initiatives for the benefit of Wild Meadows.**

The Manifesto for the Wild Meadows of Wales was written by James Robertson (Anglesey farmer and editor, *Natur Cymru*), Sue Everett and Ivy Berkshire (Flora locale), based on research by Miles King (The Grasslands Trust). The authors also acknowledge contributions provided by many other individuals and organisations.

For further information about the Wild Meadows for Wales Initiative, contact: Ivy Berkshire, The Court, Llansawel, Llandeilo, Carmarthen SA19 7JG. Tel: 07912 789003. Email: [wildmeadows.ivy@googlemail.com](mailto:wildmeadows.ivy@googlemail.com)

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**[www.wildmeadows.org.uk](http://www.wildmeadows.org.uk)**

## Flora locale

Flora locale seeks to restore wild plants and wild-plant communities to lands and landscapes across the UK, and by this means raise the biodiversity, environmental quality and enjoyment of town and countryside.

Flora locale is a Charity registered in England and Wales No. 1071212, a Scottish Registered Charity No SC039001 and UK Registered Company Limited by Guarantee No. 3539595.

Main office: Denford Manor, Lower Denford, Hungerford, RG17 0UN.

**[www.floralocale.org](http://www.floralocale.org)**

## The Grasslands Trust

The Grasslands Trust is the only national charity working specifically to protect wildflower-rich grasslands. A Charity registered in England and Wales, No. 1097893. Company Limited by Guarantee No. 4443047. Main office: Wessex House, Upper Market Street, Eastleigh, Hampshire SO50 9FD. Tel: 02380 650093.

**[www.grasslands-trust.org](http://www.grasslands-trust.org)**

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