

Parish Grasslands Project

Issue 2

May 2002

Secretary's Report

Inside this issue:

Report from the Secretary	1
Identification walks and field meeting dates	2
How much flower-rich grassland do we have on and near the Hudnalls?	3
Three flowers to look out for	4
Dates for your diary	4

During the winter months the committee has met a number of times and has decided to try and move forward on two fronts.

The original questionnaire revealed that a small number of members were not satisfied with their arrangements for looking after their fields. We have decided to try and find a means of grant aid to look after these fields and to try out different methods of management and to record the changes and assess how effective they will be. A meeting was arranged with DEFRA to examine the stewardship scheme and to find out the depth of commitment we will be undertaking. This meeting was very successful and DEFRA are keen to set up a target group. Each application will be independent but we can operate as a group. Applications have to be completed by May 31st 2002. It will be possible for other members to join the target group at a later date.

We also decided to try and set up a data base for the whole of the parishes of St Briavels, Hewelsfield and Brockweir.

Our first need is maps and we hope that we can obtain these with the help of the County Council and the Countryside Agency. The County Archaeologist Jan Wills has expressed great interest in our project and commented that we are in the process of preserving an historic landscape. English Nature and the AONB have also expressed their support. We have applied to the

Countryside Agency for funding for this part of our work in order to establish a baseline into which we can feed data in subsequent years. This application has been successful and we are to receive 75% of the funds.

We would ask all members to help in this process of data collection by keeping a record of the flowering plants in their own fields. Each field has a number. You may know your field numbers but if not we will have maps with field numbers on them available to you at one of our meetings during the summer. The information you record will give us a picture of the distribution of different species across our grasslands.

I know that this sounds very daunting and I hope you are still reading this since it is not as bad as it sounds. You will find enclosed with this Newsletter several data sheets with lists of grassland species, both latin and common names. Don't be worried by the grasses. They are notoriously difficult to identify even for the experts, so just leave them out if you don't know. The species list is not exhaustive and does not contain species that are normally found in woodlands such as bluebells. If you find flowers that are not on the list please use one of the spaces at the end of the species list and enter the common names.

The local Officer from FWAG (Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group) has called our project a model for other groups around the country with similar aims. It is therefore all the more important to make sure our project is a success!

All we require is that you walk around each field on a date of your choice in May/June and July/August and put the

The Committee

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Secretary's Report (contd)

appropriate letter in the column. A for abundant if the flowers are everywhere, C for common if they are, and R for rare if you find only a small number.

We will be holding a few "identification walks" during the summer if you need help in plant identification. If you don't know the plant then leave it out. Members of the committee will be prepared to help, so give someone a ring if necessary.

We will also be publishing a guide to identification in the newsletters and we would welcome help from members in preparing this. Carol Wilson has prepared the first guide which is published in this newsletter.

Please try to gather this information together using a different sheet for each field and return the sheets to me in the autumn. If you need more sheets, then please ring me on 01594 530513.



Please talk to your neighbours about the Project and persuade them to join us and help to make this data recording more effective. The more involved, the fuller our records will become.

We intend to use our grant from the Countryside Agency to publish information leaflets about our grasslands and also to help keep other records.

Can you help by looking out **old photographs** that show your fields as they were some years ago. Even if there is someone or something in the foreground these photos would still be useful. Please write your name on the back and let me have them either at the field meeting or whenever possible. We can copy them and return them to you. Alternatively, start a photographic record of your own by taking a picture of your fields once every year. Try and do it from the same place so that you get a comparison. We would like to receive these photos or make copies

of them to build up records of the Common.

Reading this through I realise how much we are asking members to do. I hope that you will be able to help us and that you feel we are making progress

Peter Chard

Identifying plants for the Data Record

Walks will be on:

- Saturday 1st June
- Saturday 22nd June

For both walks meet at the Mackenzie Hall car park at 2pm.

The walks will be led by George Peterken assisted by Peter Chard.

Field Meetings

Our first field meeting will take place on Saturday May 25th at 2pm and will start at Bryn House, Brockweir Road, Hewelsfield. Bryn House is 250 metres below the Hewelsfield crossroads. There is room to park 10 cars above, below and in Box Cottage drive. We will be looking at fields with

problems of management, and then going down to Brook Farm, Brockweir, by kind permission of Miss Thomson, where we shall see fields that are rich in a variety of flowers and have been managed very effectively.

A second field meeting will be held on Saturday 7th September.

How much flower-rich grassland do we have on and near the Hudnalls Common?

In January 1999, I hurriedly mapped the vegetation in those parts of the parishes of St Briavels and Hewelsfield that fell within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This was done to provide a land use illustration for the Wye Valley AONB Nature Conservation Strategy that was launched that summer at a gathering in the Mackenzie Hall. However, it also provides a rough estimate of the total area of flower-rich grassland in and around the Common.

Mapping was done from public roads and paths – remarkably, virtually every plot can be seen from a path, road or wood. Plots were usually assigned to one vegetation category, even though some contained small areas of different types (e.g. orchards in gardens). Grassland was recorded as ‘semi-natural’, ‘improved’ or ‘ley’ where possible, but in mid-winter this was inevitably a very approximate exercise, and several mistakes were certainly made. Plot areas were taken from the OS 25” 1902 and 1921 editions, where they are given in acres. The Hudnalls Common was defined as the area shown as extra-parochial on the 1841 Tithe map.

The table below gives the land use summary for all types of vegetation. The second column gives the areas recorded. The third column gives my estimate of how much of each of the mapped categories was actually flower-rich grassland. If these guesses are about right, we have about 576 acres (233 ha) of such grassland on the Common, distributed over several hundred plots. In addition, some 46 acres of semi-natural grassland and 33 acres of undifferentiated grassland were present in small fields immediately adjacent to the Common. So, the total area of semi-natural grassland in our ‘area of interest’ is roughly 655 acres (265 ha).

This figure can be used as a rough estimate of the resource until we get a better one. The survey needs to be repeated in the growing season, when grassland can be categorised accurately. We also need to up-date it, and take account of the degree of neglect, which appears to have increased during 2000 and 2001.

George Peterken

Vegetation	Acres	Estimated area of semi-natural	Notes
Undifferentiated	276.5	230	Most of this seems to be semi-natural.
Sown leys	106.1	5	Mostly ryegrass leys. Allows a small area for mistaken identification.
‘Improved’ native	34.1	10	This is native grassland that has been strongly limed, fertilised and/or
Semi-natural	292.2	260	Pasture and/or meadows, many neglected. Limited areas may be
Bracken	23.7	20	Former semi-natural grassland, now mostly bracken, but with some
Orchards	0.8	1	With semi-natural grassland below.
Arable	2.6	0	A field then being re-sown as ley + a pig paddock.
Woodland	326.2	0	Native mixtures, ancient and secondary.
Plantation	22.4	0	Stock mainly planted, but includes native elements.
Scrub	2.0	0	Shrubby thicket, but more ‘lost’ in woodland.
Houses and	191.9	50	Includes many large lawns, parts of which may well be semi-natural
TOTAL	1278.5	576	

Among the Grasslands this Month

Three of the flowers you could be looking for

THE SPOTTED ORCHID *Dactylorhiza fuchsia*

This can be found quite commonly in damp places in open ground. Underground it has a flattened form of tuber, with fleshy roots spreading out above. The stem can vary in height from six inches to two feet finishing in a dense spike of pale purple flowers each of which has a lip marked with dots of deeper purple, cut into three lobes. The leaves are also usually spotted deep purple. It can be found flowering from late May up until late July.



PIGNUT or EARTH NUT *Conopodium majus*

This is easily found in meadowland and to many people is "a sort of Hedge Parsley". Differences are that it is shorter, only about two feet, and has only a few thin leaves/bracts below the white flowerheads or umbels. The leaves are altogether thinner and more lace-like. It has a swollen root/tuber, and could have been used as fodder at one time; hence its name. It flowers from May to June.



LESSER STITCHWORT *Stellaria graminea*

Like its relative, the Greater Stitchwort, this is a common plant of hedgerows and is thin, hairless and straggly. In spite of this unappealing description its little, white starry flowers are well worth spotting among the grass and bluebells in April and May. The name is linked to an old wives' tale that it was useful in curing 'the stitch'! Lesser Stitchwort is more slender than Greater Stitchwort with smooth-edged leaves and more deeply lobed petals.



Dates for your Diary

Saturday 25th May	First Field Meeting	Bryn House, 2pm
Saturday 1st June	Identification Walk	Mackenzie Hall Car Park, 2pm
Saturday 22nd June	Identification Walk	Mackenzie Hall Car Park, 2pm
Saturday 7th September	Second Field Meeting	2pm
Tuesday 12th November	AGM	Mackenzie Hall, 7.30pm

Your input required!

We need your articles for the next Newsletter.

- Deadline for the Autumn issue is 1st October
- Send your articles to the Secretary, Peter Chard, Bryn House, Brockweir Road, Hewelsfield, Lydney GL15 6UR

The aim of this Project is to conserve and enhance the landscape of the parishes of St Briavels, Hewelsfield & Brockweir by maintaining and managing the semi-natural grasslands and associated features.