



NEWSLETTER

www.pariishgrasslandsproject.org.uk

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FOOD FROM OUR FIELDS

This is our theme for 2010. We had meetings on orchards and bee-keeping in recent years, and we have always encouraged field owners to keep sheep and enjoy the meat, and then in February we highlighted the fungi and fruits that can be gathered in and around out fields, and eaten or drunk as appropriate. In the autumn we hope to arrange a meeting which will, we hope, be a tasty celebration of the food and drink we can produce around us.

We are also proposing another small book, to follow Flowers in the Fields. This will be on the local wildlife - birds, butterflies, furry things .. - and we aim to compile it from the interest, knowledge and stories of those who live here. New committee member, Edward Hutchings will co-ordinate it. Details will appear in our Village News contributions.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 2010 ARE NOW DUE

The subscription rate is still currently £5 per household. For a couple this is equivalent to less than 5p per week, and therefore represents terrific value for 2 beautifully produced Newsletters per year, plus two meetings with speakers and refreshments!

You can probably imagine what is coming next. . . . Raising the rate for next year is under consideration. An increase of £1, for example, would be equivalent to 1p per week per person for a couple. It is to be hoped that members would support such a move. Our general accounts showed a drop in income last year, largely due to the fact that we did not have an Open Day.

However, a new PGP initiative is afoot, which will require some match funding, and as a supporter of the aims and objectives of the PGP we hope that you, as members, will continue to subscribe.

The Treasurer would appreciate prompt payment of this year's subscription – reminders all cost money and time. If you decide that you do not wish to renew, it would save a certain amount of futile effort chasing subs if you could e-mail to the following address: jeanpitt@hotmail.co.uk, or drop a note in to Court Cottage, Hewelsfield (near to the church). Please make cheques payable to Parish Grasslands Project.

The committee works hard to maintain a programme of local interest and relevance. Please continue to support us – even make a small extra donation. Jean Pitt (Treasurer).

Flower of the month



Lesser celandine
Ranunculus ficaria

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

23rd May - Field visit: an evening with John Josephi on St. Briavels Common - fields, orchard and woodland. See Parish Magazine or website for details later.

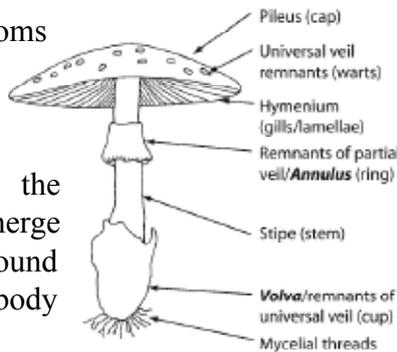
2nd October - Autumn meeting in MacKenzie Hall: following up on our Spring meeting theme "Food from our Fields" we are planning to have a buffet of food and drink . Hopefully as many members as possible will make an effort to provide "tasters" of prepared food or drinks made from sources in the wild. There are many websites with ideas and recipes. Please help us to make this a good evening.

Fungi of meadows and hedgerows by Elsa Wood

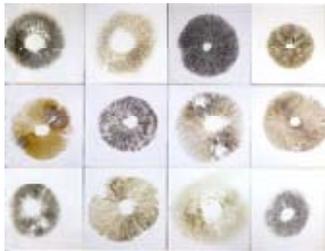
At the AGM meeting on 25 February, the theme of "Food from our fields" included a presentation on fungi by Elsa Wood. The talk covered aspects of the identification and ecology of fungi as well as information on their edibility and how to cook some of them. This article covers some of the salient points.

Fungi used to be considered to be plants but are now classified in a kingdom of their own. Many of the microscopic ascomycete fungi are vital to our every day living, rotting down waste materials and providing our daily bread, wine, beer and cheese!

The larger mushrooms and toadstools that grow in our meadows, hedgerows and woodlands are the fruiting bodies that emerge from the underground mycelium, the main body of the fungus.



To embark upon eating this free food from our fields it is essential to be able to identify them properly. Various features of the cap, stipe, ring and/or volva are important to note. A combination of a ring and a volva identifies the poisonous, sometimes deadly *Amanita* genus. The most important feature to help identify a fungus is the colour of the spores. This can easily be determined by breaking the cap from the stipe and laying it gill side down on a piece of paper. The spores will be shed within a few hours. If they are near trees



it is worth noting the tree species as many fungi are mycorrhizal (a symbiotic relationship between tree and fungus mycelium sharing water, nutrients etc.) and specific to certain

trees. For example if you have a birch tree on the edge of your fields you may find you have the iconic, hallucinogenic and poisonous fly agaric, *Amanita muscaria* growing nearby as this is mycorrhizal with birch and pine. Many fungi are saprophytic whilst a few are parasitic like the honey fungus, *Armillaria mellea*, highly prized eating in some countries.

Many grassland fungi form fairy rings. The most well known are the true agarics, the field *Agaricus campestris* and horse mushrooms, *A. arvensis* etc. They always have pink or grey gills even when young, never white;

the spore print is chocolate brown. It is also important with true mushrooms to check that the base of the stipe does not turn bright brassy yellow on cutting. These yellow staining mushrooms can cause serious digestive upsets and should be avoided. White gilled and white spored fungi may well be poisonous *Clitocybe spp.*

There are several other tasty field species, including the fairy ring champion, *Marasmius oreades*; blewits, *Lepista nuda* and *L. saeva* (with a delicate pale pink spore print which distinguishes it from other mauve and potentially poisonous fungi); shaggy ink cap *Coprinus commatus*; giant puffballs *Calvatia gigantea*; and some of the waxcaps, particularly the meadow waxcap *Hygrocybe pratensis*.

Species to avoid are salmon pink spored *Enteloma spp.*, those that colonise fresh dung such as *Panaeolus* and *Stropharia spp* and most species with mid brown, cigar brown or rust brown spores; remember field mushrooms have chocolate brown spores.

Although most fungi appear in the autumn it is worth looking out for morels *Morchella spp* and St George's mushroom, *Calocybe gambosum* in the spring.

Many of the edible woodland fungi may occur in the hedgerows such as chantarelle, oyster mushroom, boletes and russulas



If you are trying fungi for the first time it is worth tasting them individually first. Cook them well in a little butter in a frying pan and serve with a bit of crusty bread. Some species such as honey fungus, the blusher,

Amanita rubescens and *Clitocybe nebularis* are indigestible or toxic when raw but are O. K. when cooked so make sure your specimens are well cooked. When you have a taste for the species you like you can incorporate them into your favourite mushroom recipes. One or two species, the common ink cap *Coprinus atramentarius* have an adverse effect with alcohol so be cautious with the glasses of wine with all new tastings!

The greatest bit of advice is 'If in doubt about what it is –DON'T EAT IT!'

Drinks from wild fruits and herbs by Tony Eggar

Continuing the theme of “Food from our fields” at the February meeting, Tony Eggar outlined a number of fruits and herbs that are fairly easy to obtain in our local area which can be readily converted into drinks for the effort of just collecting the ingredients.

This article reproduces a few of the recipes. It is hoped that members will be inspired by these and that there will be reports of large numbers of people spotted this autumn, scouring the fields and hedgerows for free food!

Elderflower Cordial

Ingredients

25	Elderflower heads
2 kg	Granulated sugar
2 litres	Boiling water
50 g	Citric acid
4	Oranges - sliced
1	Lemon - sliced



Recipe

Shake elderflower heads for insects
Boil water in large saucepan
Add sugar and stir until dissolved
Add oranges and lemon and citric acid
Add flower heads, gently stir
Leave for 48 hrs, stirring occasionally
Sieve then strain through muslin
Pour into clean bottles with screw tops

Rosehip Syrup

Ingredients

1 Kg	Rosehips
3 litres	Water
450 g	Sugar



Recipe

Choose fresh, fully ripe and deep red hips
Crush, grate or mince hips
Put into 2 litres of boiling water
Bring to boil, remove, stand for 10 – 15 mins
Strain through cloth until dripping stops
Return pulp to pan, add 1 litre boiling water
Reboil, stand 10 – 15 mins, strain as before
Mix extracts in clean pan, reduce to 1 litre
Add sugar, dissolve, boil for 5 mins
Pour into clean hot bottles and seal

Wild Mint Julep

20 mint leaves & 2 tsp sugar in a glass
Press together to make a mash
Add a large measure of Canadian Club
Top up with crushed ice, stir well



There is a mass of fruits, nuts, berries and fungi that are available in our area and the samples above are some of the easiest and most available to collect. Theoretically, one could survive quite well living in the wild around here. However, with the recent winter we have just had, you would have been hard pressed!

Higher Nature Value farmland

The European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP) is a Europe-wide network which raises awareness of the importance of low-intensity farming for nature conservation (Higher Nature Value farmland or HNV for short) and aims to improve the way public policies respond to the needs of these farming systems. It is aiming to run a project in the Wye Valley AONB this year using the semi-natural grasslands as a focus for shaping future European policy and support.

The project aims to field trial the EU Guidance to Member States on HNV farmland identification using local expertise, and steered by Guy Beaufoy, who devised the guidance. The aspiration: to present to government agencies a workable methodology that can be implemented elsewhere in lowland UK. The project also seeks to carry out a SWOT analysis and needs assessment of the HNV farmland and identify expected gaps in support and policy issues which make delivering such support to the landowners like ourselves that care for these biodiverse parcels of land, difficult or impossible.

This potentially influential project could raise the profile of and safeguard our unique meadows into the future. We will keep you in touch with how this project develops. Sarah Sawyer

Grassland Management by Mike Topp

This is the time of year when we are looking out keenly for the first signs that our grass has broken the long winter dormancy and has started growing once more. And along with our cherished grass, will come growth of unwelcome and unloved plants like bracken, dock and thistle. So this is also a time to begin to think about controlling the wilder flora that can invade our fields, and particularly encroach at their edges. And that's where the Parish Grasslands flailing service comes in. Our Dragone flail, front-mounted on the Alpine tractor, can pulverise pretty much anything, including bramble and scrub, and an early treatment is recommended. We are now taking bookings, so please get in touch (details below).

This is also probably a good moment to take stock of the machinery that the Parish Grasslands Groups currently owns, as there have been some significant changes in the past year. In 2009 we rethought our relationship with our partners across the valley in Monmouthshire Meadows Group. We had been trying, not always successfully, to service their rather far-flung fields, as well as those of our own more closely-knit members, with the machinery jointly owned by the two organisations, and which was stored, maintained and operated by John and Robert Childs at Cowshill Farm. After discussions with MMG we agreed that a better arrangement would be to operate any machinery quite separately on each side of the valley, and that in order to do that we should divide the machinery. The settlement we drew up reflected the fact that MMG had been responsible for approximately 20 per cent of the total funding raised by the two groups, and involved MMG having the Massey Ferguson 135 tractor, the tedder, the minibaler and the wrapper, while we retained the remainder. MMG will operate the machinery using their own contractor. For our part we felt happy with this way of dividing the machinery, given the fact that we rarely used the Massey Ferguson tractor, and that the minibaler was in many ways proving unsatisfactory. Yes, it produced small bales that were popular with some members because they were easily handled. But on the other hand because it collected and baled relatively small amounts of hay, it took a considerable time to bale one field, and that could prove to be expensive for members. Added to that was the fact that the machine frequently became blocked, so that operations had to stop while the jammed hay was pulled out by hand, and there were quite often more serious mechanical problems. John Childs had

in any case been making increasing use of his own large baler in members' fields. This robust machine is capable of baling a field much more quickly than the minibaler, and is mechanically much more reliable. So use of the large baler adds up to a more efficient operation, a quicker turn-round, and a smaller bill for members. The one possible disadvantage is that the machine produces large bales, which, unlike those produced by the minibaler, cannot be picked up by hand. But, as my wife Judy and I discovered last year, two people can, with a little difficulty, manhandle them -- although care is needed, as they roll downhill very easily, and very quickly! John normally operates the large baler with his even larger Massey Ferguson 3645 tractor. In fact with John on the Alpine tractor with the rotary rake, rowing up the hay, and his son Robert following with the baler, they made short work of our fields last summer.



One worry we did have concerned the difficulty of access to some members' fields with the large baler. The machine itself is not particularly large, and in fact much narrower than most "conventional" balers. But the tractor is large. However last summer John teamed the baler with the Alpine tractor for the first time, and succeeded with that combination in baling fields at one of most conservation-rich but difficult to access properties in our list. So we are quietly confident that we can use the large baler in any field where we were able to operate the minibaler.

The table lists all the machinery we currently own,. Don't forget to place those early orders for flailing. Contact me by telephone, on 01594 531 496, or by email, at mike.topp@yahoo.co.uk.

Vithar 700 AR Tractor	Italian Alpine articulated 4WD tractor
Dragone Flail front mounted	Pulverises bracken, bramble and scrub
Bracken Bruiser	Small ridged roller that crushes bracken
Disc Mower front mounted	Cuts hay very efficiently
Hay Turner and Rower Up	Rear mounted
Fence Post Basher	Drives fence posts into soil efficiently
Large Trailer	Long wheel base
Strimmer, Brush Saw	To cut areas not accessible for tractors