

# Stay legal in the hedgerow

John Josephi has some helpful tips for managing your hedges



For anyone intending to actively manage a hedgerow in this country there are two questions which should be asked:

First: Is there a legal “close season” during which hedgerow management will constitute an offence? The simple answer to this one is “No”, but there is a less simple answer which runs thus: Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 it is an offence intentionally to kill or injure any wild bird or to recklessly disturb certain wildbirds and their young while they are nesting. So your perfectly legal hedgelaying work may get you into hot water if carried out at the wrong time of year, i.e. the time when your chances of disturbing birds are at their greatest. When is that?

Well, the officially recognised bird breeding season is between 1 March and 31 August, so that leaves us a six month winter window for doing the work, which is no hardship, because that is the season when a hedge responds best to a bit of tough love – September to February is our season,

Second: At what point in our working season should we do each operation? What follows is my advice, which can always be ignored, and it covers Coppicing/felling, Laying and Trimming.

**Coppicing/felling:** This is the most drastic step, and generally only employed when the hedge has grown too big for “management”. Any time before March will do, but stools (stumps) cut before Christmas may be that bit quicker to throw up new hedge shoots in the spring than your February cut tree.

**Laying:** This is the best of all for a hedge that has not grown too tall, and can be carried out at any time from September to February. There are courses, books and there’s Do-it-Yourself, all of which can crank the hedge owner up to an acceptable level of competence, and it’s hugely satisfying.

**Trimming/Flailing:** I maintain that if you do this early in September you give the hedge a chance to

## No vacancies



## Terminal decline?



## Proper job!

put out a bit of “Lammas” growth to thicken it up after its haircut, making it warmer and better shelter during the coming winter. Farmers have traditionally done this in February, throwing the hedge wide open to the elements at just the time when birds seek privacy. Ah! But what about the berries? Good point, but remember, if you are trimming annually then the material you remove will be too juvenile to bear flowers/fruit and may not anyway be berry-bearing species.

**Long Term:** A well layed/trimmed hedge should serve as a low, stockproof wildlife corridor, ticking all the environmental boxes, but over the years it may become “leggy” and draughty in the bottom. When this happens you may need to leave well alone for a few years for it to put on height, and then lay it again, but... sufficient unto the day!

**References:** Natural England produce a useful handout and Google has a lot of Q & A type info.

Don’t delay!



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# NEWSLETTER

www.parishgrasslandsproject.org.uk

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## Fresh ideas on woodland

There will be twin themes at this year’s spring meeting and AGM: some fresh ideas about the management of small woodlands and the Wye Valley River Festival. After the formal AGM business has been completed, Sarah Sawyer, Community Links Officer for the Wye Valley AONB, will show a short film about the inaugural river festival, which took place last May. Sarah will also talk about plans for the next river festival, in 2016, and explain how to become involved.

Andrew Clarke of the Resilience Centre will give an illustrated talk in which he will share his ideas about the management of small woodlands. Andrew and his team were behind the St Briavels Community Wind Turbine, and have now launched a Resilient Woodlands Initiative. Andrew will outline ideas for fostering sustainable management and mutual support for owners of small woodlands. The meeting, at the Mackenzie Hall at 7.30pm on Thursday March 19, is open to all, free admission to members, donations welcome from non-members.

## HELP NEEDED TO SAVE KINGCOED MEADOWS

An ambitious scheme to buy two species-rich hay meadows at Kingcoed near Raglan has been launched by Monmouthshire Meadows Group. For details of how to help go to [www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk](http://www.monmouthshiremeadows.org.uk) and click the link at the top of the page.

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## Things to spot this month



Frogs & spawn; Primrose;  
Chiffchaff; Orange Tip

# A profusion of orchids

**George Peterken** seeks out local records of some of the less common species of a flower that holds a special fascination

Orchids seem to hold a special fascination, both for specialist botanists and the general public. Indeed, the PGP has noticed that field owners invariably respond if they find orchids: fields are 'interesting' with an orchid, less so without. The great majority of local orchids are Common Spotted Orchids, but at least eight other species have appeared within our parishes in recent decades, and there just may be more to find.

The Common Spotted Orchids produce the main displays and can become abundant within a few years



**Green-veined orchid** Photos: George Peterken

with the right management. They produce millions of dust-like seeds if the hay is cut late or the field is not grazed until well after mid-summer, and these are blown far and wide on the wind. New plants grow slowly, but can reach flowering size after perhaps five years: we have found them growing with an old pot plant we forgot to throw out, and I have seen them in amongst perennials in flower beds. Even in consistently-managed fields, they have good years and bad, but this is more likely to be due to growing conditions in spring and possibly exhaustion from heavy flowering the year before. At their best, they will colour a field magenta, but if one looks closely at the flowers, the patterning of colour on the petals is different in each plant – a form of 'finger-print'. This identifier allows groups of identical forms to be found, which must be old plants that have grown large enough to split naturally.

Two other orchids still have significant local populations. The Heath Spotted Orchid - a dainty version of the common one - was frequent in what was Peter Chard's field: he was pleased to be the only field owner with them, but I suspect they survive elsewhere. The distinctive Twayblade, with its two broad leaves, grows in at least four properties, both

## What's new in Phil's tool shed?

*This is the first in a series in which contributors to Our Fields, the PGP's latest publication, provide an update on developments on their patches*

A nice little addition to the tool shed: a froe. I couldn't find one anywhere locally, and had to buy this one from a blacksmith near Birmingham over the Internet. I had to make a handle for it. It makes remarkably cheap gates. You start a split at the top of the wood then lever one way or the other according to where the split is heading. One or two failures seem to be essential.



I'm now thinking of decorative fencing for the garden ....

**Phil Morgan**



**Broad-leaved Helleborine, Bird's-nest Orchid, Early Marsh Orchid, Early Purple Orchid**



**Heath Spotted Orchid, Lesser Butterfly Orchid, Autumn Lady's-tresses, Twayblade**

in grass and in shade. These are still frequent in the district, but must once have been common.

Other orchids are rare, but this was not always so. Green Veined Orchids were common and widespread in Gloucestershire meadows and pastures until the 1940s, but have only been seen recently in Liz Rush's field, and they have not flowered there for a few years. Fine displays can be seen in Gwent Wildlife Trust reserves in Trellech and Penallt. Autumn Lady's-tresses were noted by Flora Klickman growing in fields by her house, but they had not been seen since the early 1950s until a few appeared in the verge outside Frances Discombe's bungalow.

Early Marsh Orchids were recorded near Brockweir in the early 20th century, but had vanished until Mike Topp found a single specimen amongst his Castlemilk Moorit sheep. Likewise, Bird's-nest Orchid was only known from an early 20th century sighting in a wood at Madgett's until a couple of plants appeared a few years ago in shade in Sally Secrett's land. Bee Orchids have survived in an open grassy verge within the new houses around St Briavels, carefully nurtured by the neighbours. And, Early Purple Orchids still grow on the main road verge near Hewelsfield, despite being mown out each year before they can set seed. They also appeared briefly beside a wall in the core of the

Hudnalls, but may have been obliterated during wall repairs. They were once regarded as male aphrodisiacs – but I'd hate to give anyone ideas.

That's the sum total of what I've seen in 21 years here, but there may well be others to be found. The old Gloucestershire Flora records that Broad-leaved Helleborine was locally abundant, and I'm surprised that I've not found it. The early 20th century Chepstow Flora records that Lesser Butterfly Orchid was formerly known in woods between Bigsweir and Brockweir, and that would be a sensational find (for botanists!) if it turned up again. Pyramidal, Fly, Fragrant and Frog Orchids were once known in the district, but are not here now, as far as I know: if the last three appeared, we would be over-run with botanists cheering.

So, how is it that orchids come and go like outlaws in hiding? Their seeds are widely distributed like fungal spores, so there is always a chance that they will reach favourable places if there is a seed source in the district. However, they require the right conditions to be maintained for a decade or more before they have built up enough strength to flower. Some flower once and die, but most persist undetected in a non-flowering state for years. Individual plants flower for perhaps two weeks every few years, so one has to be interested, observant and in the right place at the right time to find them.