

No more flies on us?

Deborah Flint has a suggestion for tackling a pest that causes major problems every summer

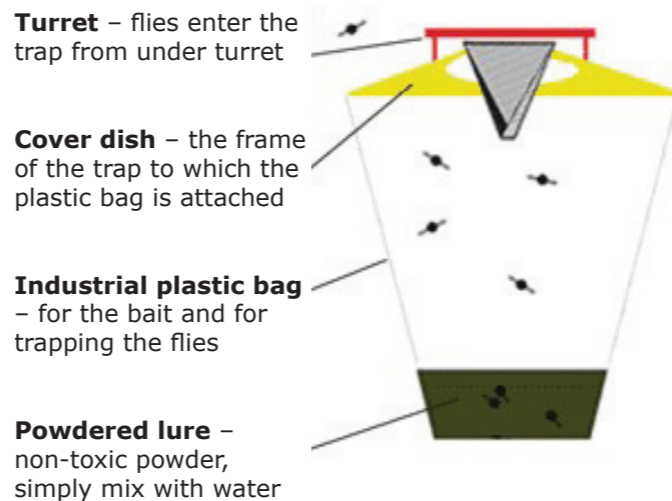
Writing when Spring hasn't yet fully sprung, the nuisance of flies is hard to recall. So, hold on to this article as you will remember it come summertime! Flies are an inevitability in our lives. Living as we all do in a rural location, there are many natural fly breeding grounds: static manure, wind-buffed soft fruits, ambulating wet sheep's wool. Desirable locations are also manmade though, such as animal food dishes, compost heaps, dirty drains and rubbish bins.

Not only a pest in the home, flies can also devastate soft fruit on the cane, spread disease to our homes and kill healthy livestock through flystrike in a matter of days. So it isn't a surprise that we need to control them. Pesticides can be indiscriminate though and can be as bad for us and the environment as for the flies! So how can we be more selective?

For the last three years here at Cinderhill Farm we have been testing the Red Topped Fly Catcher – a safe, simple, non-toxic way to vastly reduce the fly population on the farm and around our home. Hung correctly and costing no more than a tenner, each trap reduces the fly population by around 20,000 flies in 12 weeks. We use around 10 at a time on our 8-acre farm, using them to protect our food production unit, our home, the barn and the animal pens.

Starting to work within hours, they are hung outdoors in a sunny location at head height, around 15 metres from the place you wish to keep fly-free – home, livestock, poultry coups or stables. Hanging them is easier with four hands but possible with two.

A South African invention, Red Top Fly Catchers are safe,



practical and easy to use. Inside the three-litre trap is a bait to lure the flies into a place from which they cannot escape. The blurb says that 85 per cent of the flies caught in the trap are female, and that by controlling the female, the entire fly population in the area can be brought under control.

Once finished with, the traps' contents can be composted, the lids recycled, and the remaining small plastic bag is the only part that needs to go in the bin. Cheaper versions work, but the original Red Top Flycatcher works best of all.

You can buy them from the website, www.redtopflycatcher.co.uk for £9.49 per trap for up to ten traps and successively cheaper for larger quantities ranging up to £7 each for 100 or more. If you are interested in joining a bulk order, please email info@parishgrasslandsproject.org.uk indicating how many traps you wish to buy.

Latest developments on the community orchard

As most of you will know, we have had a setback in the community orchard project. In the light of legal advice, Mary Harris has had to withdraw her offer of a site for the orchard. I know Mary has come to this decision very reluctantly, and I salute her generosity of spirit in making the original offer.

This does not necessarily mean the end of the project. We have established that there is sufficient interest locally to launch a community orchard. If we can find a suitable piece of land we are ready to restart the project. I repeat the earlier plea for suggestions for a site, however improbable they may seem. Please get in touch via info@parishgrasslandsproject.org.uk.

We have been encouraged by the number of people who have already come forward to express an interest in helping with various roles in the project. Now it would be useful to identify someone prepared to lead the project. Please get in touch if you feel able to do so. Meantime we are planning to organise a visit to established orchards later in the year. More news later.

Mike Topp

Small flock of rare-breed sheep available for grazing

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust is offering its flock of 25 Hebridian sheep for some temporary grazing. The offer has come from Terry Claxton, who is working for the trust in the Forest of Dean area, helping with reserve management and looking after the trust's livestock.

Terry explains: "These are a very hardy rare-breed sheep. At this time of year there is limited grazing on the trust's reserves so we would be happy to help graze other sites. These sites would need to be adequately fenced and have access for our full-size stock trailer to get within 20 metres or so of the entrance. We can provide a water trough if there is no water supply.

"There would also need to be enough for the sheep to eat. Because these are primitive sheep they like to browse trees, brambles and scrubby bushes as much as grass, so they can cope with a variety of sites."

If you have a site where the sheep might be of use please contact Terry at terry.claxton@gloucestershirewildlifetrust.co.uk or on 07734 599 585.



NEWSLETTER

www.parishgrasslandsproject.org.uk

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Yellow rattle (above) is thriving locally, but many species are not

Our challenge: find the lost wild flowers

The AGM will feature two talks about local wild flowers. One, by George Peterken, will summarise findings from the PGP's 2017 wild flower survey and our plans to continue it in 2018. The other, by Elsa Wood of The Nurtons, will be about the wild flowers of the Wye Valley in general. Elsa is the Botanical Recorder for Monmouthshire, our local expert field botanist. The meeting is at the Mackenzie Hall at 7.30pm on Thursday March 15.

Both talks will show that the local wild flora is still colourful and diverse, but also that its diversity is declining. Of the eight species featured for the 2017 flower survey, five were holding their own (e.g., Cowslip), three were declining (e.g., Harebell) and none was

George Peterken introduces this month's AGM

increasing. Moreover, we know that several other species survive as very small, at-risk populations (e.g., Early-purple Orchid; Dyer's Greenweed). We are not alone in this: much the same can be said about the Wye Valley as a whole.

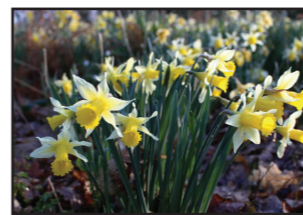
Recent declines appear to be just the latest instalment of a long-term decline. A century ago, a local Flora recorded about 500 wild species in our two parishes, but I can remember finding

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Things to spot this month



Hawfinch, Wild Daffodils

Grassroots leaders

The PGP is only a parish society, but it has had an impact well beyond the boundaries of our two parishes. When we started in 2001, we believed ourselves to be unique, and to this day we have not found another community grassland project quite like us. We have since morphed into a parish environment society, i.e., we have extended our interest beyond the fields that were our first concern, and that has brought us closer to other local environmental groups, but we remain distinctive.

More importantly, other places have imitated us in establishing community grassland projects. The first was the Monmouthshire Meadows Group (2002), started by our friends and neighbours when they saw the level of enthusiasm for the PGP, and this was eventually followed by the Dean Meadows Group (2012) and Herefordshire Meadows (2015) to established the southern Welsh borderlands as the focus of community grassland conservation. Once we and MMG were up and running, we attracted interest from elsewhere, and this has so far led to further projects in the Shropshire Hills, Devon (Moor Meadows, covering Dartmoor and its surroundings) and Carmarthenshire. This is where the spark that was lit when a small group of us met during the thick of the Foot and Mouth and BSE outbreaks had led.

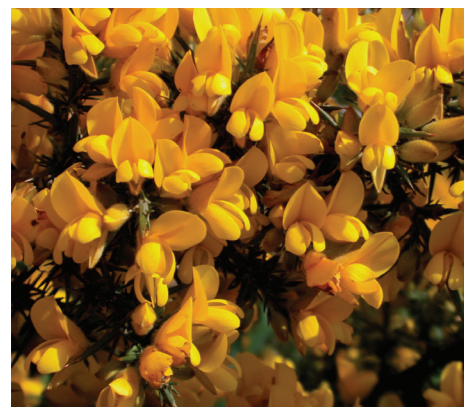
George Peterken explains how the PGP inspired the formation of a range of other grassland groups

There were, or course, many other grassland conservation initiatives before us, but they were sponsored by national or county organisations who employed people to promote grassland conservation. The PGP and the other groups work the other way. It is the people in possession of flower-rich fields, and others with an interest, who have formed themselves into self-help groups and called on outside help and money when there was a need. Inevitably, we describe ourselves as grassroots organisations, a bottom up process that contrasts with the usual top down approach. The main exception is Herefordshire Meadows, which set out very deliberately to involve the farming community as well as the amateur (small-scale) landowners, and which has been aided by a grant from Natural England that supports an organiser. But even here the initiative came from the grassland owners, not the outside organisation.

Like the PGP, these groups are not just nature



Four species to look out for in 2018. All four grew in the parish 100 years ago, but GP has not seen them here recently. All can be found easily not far away.



Left: Bell heather, top, and Common gorse

Right, Carlina thistle (the 'picnicker's complaint')

Far right, Cow-wheat

Our challenge



Here is what the PGP has led to ... the Moor Meadows conference on the edge of Dartmoor, attended by about 150 people, with many more on a waiting list and unable to get in

conservation outfits, but organisations that seek to maintain moderate use of land in ways that maintain or restore biodiversity and avoid dereliction. We have wide interests, from public enjoyment of our surroundings to maintaining ecological services, such as pollinators, and we all support environmentally-friendly meat production. In practice, the groups are not so different from, say, Plantlife's campaigns Millennium Meadows and Save our Magnificent

Meadows, or the Haytime projects initiated in the Yorkshire Dales National Park and the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, or indeed the National Trust's various grassland projects on its own land. They all have a broad interest and hope to reach out to the general public, not just specialist interests. We hope the PGP has "made a difference" on home turf, but we are sure we have made a real contribution to environmental conservation elsewhere.

to find the lost wild flowers

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just 289 of these in recent years, and I am reasonably sure that some have long been locally extinct.

During 2018, we take up the challenge by searching for the "missing" 211 species in the hope of disproving the alarming implication that we have lost 40% of our wild flora in the last century. We expect to find some easily, but others have not been seen for years. Lists will be available and any help in the search will be much appreciated, though one has to admit that some missing species are obscure and hard to identify.

If, by next autumn, we still have a substantial list of missing species, we will have to consider why, whether it matters and to whom, and whether we can realistically do anything about it. But that is for the future: first we have to be sure that there has in fact been a substantial decline in wild plant diversity.

