

HEREFORDSHIRE MEADOWS

NEWSLETTER MARCH 2024

An end is in sight after a very wet conclusion to winter.

Yellow rattle seedlings have started to appear across Herefordshire, an exciting time for last year's restoration meadow owners!

And preparations are being made for this year's work, with around 9.5 Hectares of restoration work planned as part of our North Herefordshire project, funded through a generous donation from the former Kingspan Insulation Community Trust. We also have lots of surveying, research, collaborative projects and meadow conservation planned.

With so much work in the pipe-line we are growing as a team, and a new Assistant Meadows Advisor will be joining us this spring.

Please read on for an update of our recent work and upcoming plans.

Thank you from the Herefordshire Meadows team.



Bringing Nature Back: A promotional film

Along with the [The Wye and Usk Foundation](#) we have put together a video piece showcasing the work we get up to and hearing from some of the Meadow Makers we have worked with in the past.

We are very grateful to [Air Wick UK](#) and [WWF UK](#) who supported our habitat creation work in 2022 and 2023, helping us to create over 150 acres of new species rich meadows across Herefordshire. [#bringingnatureback](#)

The film features:

- Seed harvesting at Joans Hills Farm a [Plantlife: saving wild plants](#) Nature Reserve and Herefordshire's County Coronation Meadow.
- Seed spreading spreading at Ail Meadow a [Herefordshire Wildlife Trust](#) Nature Reserve in the Woolhope Dome.

Check out the video [here](#)



www.herefordshiremeadows.org.uk/

A Charitable Incorporated Organisation
Charity number: 1198105

General enquiries:

info@herefordshiremeadows.org.uk

We're Hiring!

We are delighted to announce that we are offering an opportunity for somebody to join our small team as an [Assistant Meadows Advisor](#):

- Advising landowners on meadow restoration, conservation & management.
- Raising awareness of the benefits of flower rich swards
- Expanding the profile of Herefordshire Meadows through website, social media and newsletters
- Supporting landowner knowledge exchange and improving skills through training and events.
- Flexible home and field working
- Up to 4 days (30 hrs) per week
- Initially for 6 months starting 29th April 2024

If you're from a farming or conservation background, with some knowledge of plant ID and with enthusiasm for diverse swards in the farmed and wider landscape – visit our [website](#) to find out more including how to apply.

Applications close on Friday 22nd March

Our Team

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The emergence of the 'Meadow Maker' Yellow rattle seedlings.

Eagerly awaited Yellow rattle seedlings started appearing in meadows across Herefordshire around the middle of February, and by March have become easier to spot and identify.

The emergence of Yellow rattle *Rhinanthus minor* is a good time to start thinking about shutting up your meadows, especially for restoration meadow owners who are trying to improve diversity.

The presence of this semi-parasitic plant helps to make space for other wildflower species to thrive, by reducing the vigour of dominant grasses from which it draws much of its nutrients and water.

As an annual plant Yellow rattle can be lost from a meadow if it is grazed off at a critical stage, leaving no plants to produce a seed source for next years' germination. So keep a look out for these little seedlings on your meadow – and get ready to move those sheep!

The Grassland Gap: An evening talk with Plantlife's Jo Riggall

Herefordshire Meadows hosted an evening zoom talk on Wednesday 29th February, with Plantlife's Grassland Advocacy Officer Jo Riggall, attended by 30 species-rich grassland enthusiasts, who all wanted to know more about this precious habitat getting the recognition it deserves.

Jo gave a summary of the impressive work that Plantlife has achieved managing, restoring and creating meadows, and [campaigning for](#) better protection and recognition of species-rich grassland (SRG).

SRG, defined as 'open, grassy habitat that is normally maintained by traditional grazing and cutting methods', is species-rich if it has more than 15 plant species per square metre, more than 30% cover of wildflowers and sedges (excluding white clover, creeping buttercup and injurious weeds), and less than 10% cover of white clover and perennial rye grass.



Yellow rattle seedling approx. 8mm tall with true leaves emerging

The Gap

After describing the multitude of benefits brought by SRG – wildlife habitats, natural beauty, natural flood defence, and healthier soils to name but a few – Jo went on to highlight the Grassland Gap: the lack of recognition that the habitat receives.

There is no dedicated resource for SRG at DEFRA, as opposed to woodland and lowland peat, and there are 9 policies to protect and promote trees and peat set out in Government Action Plans, focussing for example on better protection through the planning system, and national mapping and monitoring. Species-rich grassland gets no mention...

Jo Riggall went on to highlight the 2023 [Plantlife Briefing to call for Grassland Action Plan](#) for England, and some of the reasons for the grassland gap.

The Reasons

Incomplete mapping and monitoring, and blurred boundaries between habitat classifications means that important grassland habitats are likely declining and being lost under the radar, and a programme of evidence building is urgently needed.

There is also a need for more evidence to demonstrate the carbon storage potential of SRG grassland. The governments Net Zero Strategy is based upon England's Tree and Peat Action Plans, and has resultingly lead to lots of support and funding for protection and expansion of these habitats. Once again SRG is missing from the strategy and supporting investments, despite [the potential role grassland have to play as an effective carbon store](#).

A look at farming income for semi-natural grasslands highlights that farms relying on

grazing livestock have some of the lowest farm business incomes, and an array of additional barriers to developing more nature-friendly farming practices have been identified by farmers – eg. Higher perceived risk, lack of funding for transition, and difficulties coordinating the various incentives.

This led to a look at England's land management schemes, where there have been some recent improvements in payment rates for creation and management of SRG, but with gaps or no improvements in areas that support farmers in moving towards these systems (see recent [HM report](#) for more info). There is also an urgent need for more free, practical and dedicated support for farmers trying to navigate the grassland incentives.

The presentation is available to watch online [here](#) and the presentation slides [here](#).

Please send comments or action points to info@herefordshiremeadows.org.uk

We are grateful to Environment Agency and Herefordshire Wildlife Trust who are supporting us to explore some of the research and evidence gaps particularly relevant to Herefordshire livestock farmers, in relation to the ecosystem services provided by different grazing strategies and diverse swards.

Plantlife

For the Love of Meadows in Herefordshire

Double your donation this April!

If you have ever considered donating to support the work of Herefordshire Meadows, this April is a good time to do so!

We will be taking part in the Green Match Fund 2024 with the [Big Give](#), who have kindly agreed to match any donations we receive through their platform between the 18th and 25th of April.

This means that if we hit our target of raising £5000 in donations from our supporters that week, we will receive a total of £10,000 charitable funds.

We will use the money to provide a series of free events and training days in Herefordshire this year, all aimed at raising awareness of the importance of flower-rich grasslands and the urgent need to conserve them.

Herefordshire Meadows does not charge for membership or attendance at our events, and instead relies upon generous donations from our supporters - so if you appreciate the free advice and guidance provided, please consider making a donation during the campaign week.

The [For the Love of Meadows In Herefordshire Campaign Page](#) goes live at

midday on the 18th of April and closes at midday on the 25th – so put a reminder in your calendars and don't forget to drop by and double your money!



Winter Management Workshop at Barns Farm

On 27th February Meadows Adviser, Rory Johnson, headed up into Shropshire to deliver a workshop on winter management practices for recently restored swards to a group of farmers and farm advisers at Barns Farm.

The event was delivered in collaboration with Buglife who carried out extensive grassland restoration works at this recently acquired National Trust property last autumn as part of their 'Get the Marches Buzzing' project. Lots of interesting discussion on grazing approaches and the chal-

lenges posed by such a warm and wet winter.

The key message to take away was to take the seedling's eye view – keeping that sward short and open as we head into spring is optimal, whilst also avoiding poaching the ground.

Once the Yellow rattle seedlings start emerging then it is time to take the grazing off (especially in those establishing years after the restoration/creation has taken place). Yellow rattle is an annual so if it is grazed out then that will remove it from a site. Germination times are becoming earlier and earlier which will affect grazing calendars.

To find out more about the National Trust's work at Barns Farm through the Stepping Stones project click [here](#).

Donate

We are now fully registered for donations through the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF). If you would like to make a donation to support the preservation, restoration and creation of species rich grasslands across Herefordshire you can do this by following this [link](#)

Follow Us

We now have [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#) accounts. Please like and follow us.





**Herefordshire
Wildlife Trust**

Photo: Toby Fountain and Holly Thompson carrying out a grassland survey at St Margaret's Churchyard Local Wildlife Site, August 2022.

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If you offer services which support the creation, restoration and conservation of species rich grasslands in Herefordshire and would like to advertise these through our newsletter contact info@herefordshiremeadows.org.uk for more details. All proceeds go towards realising Herefordshire Meadows' charitable objectives. Please note listing here does not constitute an implicit endorsement by Herefordshire Meadows. Please ask if you want further references

Could your land be selected as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS)?

Do you have good quality flower rich grassland with at least six key indicator species frequent in the sward?

e.g. bird's foot trefoil, knapweed, ox eye daisy, orchid, pignut, meadow vetchling, tormentil, yellow rattle, goatsbeard, burnet saxifrage etc, present in at least 5 out of 10 stops across the whole field

Are you interested in your meadow being assessed for Local Wildlife Site status?

You can find more information about what this means [here](#).

If so then please get in touch with Toby Fountain at Herefordshire Wildlife Trust: t.fountain@herefordshirewt.co.uk to discuss a survey and assessment that will be put to an independent panel of ecologists co-ordinated by Herefordshire Council.

You can read about two Herefordshire Meadows members who went through this process in 2022 in our [April 2023 newsletter](#).

Upcoming events



Different approaches to Grassland Management

Farm walk and lunch at Madresfield Estate hosted by Pasture for Life 14th March: 10am-2pm

Pasture for Life are hosting a farm walk at Madresfield Estate for an introduction to, and comparison of different approaches to farming livestock, as part of the Pasture

and Profit in Protected Landscapes project, running in the Malvern Hills, Wye Valley and Shropshire Hills National Landscapes.

Meadows Adviser, Rory Johnson, will be one of the guest speakers at the event which will cover a whole range of different topics relating to sustainable grassland management practices.

Full details including how to book a FREE place can be found [here](#)



Scything Course with Handpowered at Llanvynoe
29th June: 10am-4pm

A scything course suitable for beginners and improvers, covering set-up, technique and maintenance of the Austrian Scythe, with training in scything a variety of vegetation types easily and effectively. All equipment provided and a range of blades to try. Refreshments provided.

£150 for the day – bookings [here](#)

This course will be repeated on Saturday 14th September.



AGRECO hay strewing with Herefordshire Meadows at Ashperton Primary School