

Dolydd Llŷn Meadows Newsletter 2022

- *Conserving, creating and sharing meadows and wildlife corridors on Llŷn*
- *Gwarchod, creu a rhannu dolydd a choridoriau bywyd gwyllt yn Llŷn*



“It took around 6,000 years to create the species-rich grassland for which the UK is globally famous, yet in less than a century we have lost 97%” (Plantlife)

Thankfully the importance of species-rich grasslands are increasingly being recognised, with more media focus again this year and various campaigns such as the Plantlife ‘Save our Magnificent Meadows’ as well as local projects such as ‘Green Resilient Spaces’ run by Social Farms and Gardens. The outline proposals for the Sustainable Farming Scheme, to be introduced in Wales in 2025, also includes plenty of scope for meadow creation in the farmed environment.

Meadows and pastures are not the only places where species-rich grasslands can flourish. In this newsletter I’ve tried to highlight the different spaces on Llŷn that we can look after in order to preserve this vanishing habitat. Every patch counts and helps to provide stepping stones for wildlife across the landscape!

Jo Porter (Dolydd Llŷn co-ordinator)



Meadow grasshopper on Yellow rattle



Scarlet waxcap



Chough



Common blue butterfly

Photographs by Ben Porter



Burial grounds

Every village has at least one chapel or church, and most have grounds consisting of unimproved grassland that can be full of flowers and fungi when given appropriate management. St Mary's Church in Nefyn (now Llŷn Maritime Museum) is in its second year of having a 'zoned' management (regularly mown at the front, whilst the area at the back is allowed to grow, flower and set seed).

www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk offer plenty of resources that can help come up with a plan.



St Mary's churchyard, Nefyn

Aberdaron Churchyard

Aberdaron churchyard boasts almost 80 species of wild plants that have been increasing in recent years. The positive management for flowers and wildlife started more than twenty years ago when the then Vicar Evelyn Davies stopped cutting the grass until after most of the flowers had finished. She retired shortly after this, but Ian and I have kept the cutting regime going, refining it further over the years. Most of the grass is cut twice a year, some not cut at all, and the area in front of the church regularly cut to give a managed, tidy appearance. Good communication with the grasscutter is important as seasons can vary.

Some five years ago the Gwynedd County Recorder looked at the plant life and recorded 70 species. We have been adding to this each year. It really is amazing how plants colonize suitable ground and conditions by themselves. In recent years sea lavender appeared as a small clump. The ground near it has been left uncut and we now have two large areas of this pretty, late summer plant. More recently orchids have appeared, although irregularly and in different places. We were delighted this year to see two butterfly orchids for the first time. Along with the plants come insects. This year there were a large number of burnet moths. A number of butterflies and thrift clearwing moths add more interest and diversity.

For anyone wanting to develop their churchyard do contact 'Caring For God's Acre', your local Wildlife Trust or National Trust. They have all been very helpful with both ideas and practical help. I am also available to discuss what we do in more detail.

Betty Wood

The interpretation board for St Hywyn's (image below) has been funded by the Welsh Government funded project 'Dawnsio ar y Dibyn)



Thrift (Betty Wood)



Kidney Vetch

Garden lawns and grassland

"My garden sings its own song. It starts after the dawn chorus with the honeybees, followed by the heavier buzz of the bumbles, punctuated by the hoverflies' higher pitch. You can even sometimes hear the rustle and creak of beetles as evening comes. To lie among it, eyes closed, is to hear something exquisite.

My garden sings this song because it is allowed to. I have long been a proponent of neglecting lawns to nurture nature, and there isn't a manicured strip of green that doesn't ache to do the same.

Most lawns have been silenced by the regime of a lawnmower, leaving just a few species of grass. They are biodiversity deserts, barren of beetle and bee, contributing to a vanishing insect population.

There is another way. Your lawn is already a wildflower meadow – every inch of soil is waiting for its moment to burst forth. Those weeds are some of the best insect food, growing despite the weather, endlessly repeat blooming, rich in nectar and pollen. A seed bank is already there – it might even contain orchids. Oh, and perhaps plenty of moss, essential stuff for nests and nature of all sorts."

Alys Fowler in The Guardian Wed 24 Apr 2019

Here are a couple of examples of turning lawns into meadows from Llŷn residents:

Local Cricieth resident Elizabeth George, said: *"A little over a year ago we decided to work with the Dolydd Llŷn Meadows project to increase the wildlife interest of our garden. We were hoping to turn our old lawn into a diverse meadow of wild flowers, grasses and a colourful habitat for birds, bees, butterflies and much more.*

With the help of a local gardener, who works with the Project, we sowed seeds harvested from a local farm's traditional hay meadow, and the plants have now established and are beginning the transformation we were hoping for, with the crucial plant yellow rattle establishing and creating conditions for other flowers and grasses to follow. We're now looking forward to see what next spring will bring."



Before



Creating bare patches to sow seed into



After

Mary Robinson, Rhyd-y-clafdy

'I'm surrounded by large monoculture arable fields. When I bought my house a few years ago there was a tiny paddock which had been turned into part of the garden: short grass, mown frequently, weed killer on anything that wasn't grass. A traditional *clawdd* on one side was a refuge for a few wild flowers and plenty of brambles and bracken. I decided that frequent mowing was a waste of time, money, petrol and the land itself and longed for the flower-rich meadows of my father's smallholding when I was growing up in the sixties. I let the grass grow in the summer before cutting it short in the autumn. I kept a narrow path round the perimeter mowed. Did I notice any changes? Yes, *sioncyn y gwair*! Grasshoppers – some even ventured into my conservatory when the door was open. There was certainly more plant variety – bird's foot trefoil, red campion, cat's-ear, violets, scarlet pimpernel, narrow-leaved plantain, ground ivy.

Two years ago I bought some commercially produced yellow rattle seed and sowed it on two experimental plots from which I had scraped away some of the grass. The result was – nothing. A year ago I was given some Llŷn-grown seed by a friend. Jonathan Neale made four one metre-square experimental plots and I was delighted that this summer the yellow rattle flowered prolifically. But I knew the little paddock could do better. One problem was the 'thatch' that had built up in the thick grass. This month Jonathan hired a special machine that tore up the thatch and dug into the ground, leaving the place looking like a battle-field. He sowed some of the yellow rattle seed I had saved plus a big bag of locally grown seed. I'm hoping that next year I'll be on the winning side in my battle to re-create a traditional wild flower meadow.'



For more information on making mini meadows visit the Plantlife meadow hub:
<https://meadows.plantlife.org.uk/making-meadows/>

Farmland

The Welsh Government is in the process of developing a new agricultural scheme that will replace the current single farm payment and environmental opt-in scheme (Glastir).

The detailed proposals - outlined in the [Sustainable Farming and our Land consultation](#) - aim to protect the land and the environment for future generations whilst providing a stable income for farmers.

Under the plans, farmers will be rewarded for environmental outcomes such as better air quality, reducing carbon emissions and improving soil quality. This will help strengthen the farmer's business and provide benefits for all the people of Wales.

Three National Trust tenanted farms in Llŷn have been trialling these principles in a 'Payment for outcome' project. The project is being delivered through the Llŷn partnership and funded by the National Trust and Welsh Government.

I interviewed Carwyn from Cwrt farm who has been part of a 'payment for outcome scheme' for the last few years.

1. What are the main changes you have made as a result of taking part in the 'Payment for outcome' trial?

We have implemented a number of changes such as increasing the size of the coastal strip by making a new *clawdd* one field inland - and are in the process of restoring these fields to hay meadows. This also involves changing the annual rhythm of grazing in these fields, as well as on the coastal slopes. We have also started to use herbal leys instead of ryegrass mixtures and have planted trees on slopes and margins. We also have a wide strip around some of the fields to encourage native arable species such as corn spurrey and wild pansy.

However, the main shift has been a change of mindset, instead of 'more is better', we are not as intensive as we used to be so there are less inputs.

2. What is the main difference between this new scheme and previous environmental schemes such as Glastir?

Our opinion counts, so we feel more included and more in charge. We can make our own decisions about how to achieve things instead of being told what to do. Glastir was very prescriptive with just a list of dates when we could or couldn't do things, and a list of actions we had to do to get paid. It was very heavy on paperwork and there was no one to ask or get advice from. With this scheme there is much more flexibility with the changing seasons and available advice. There's also incentive to make the changes because the better a habitat becomes, the bigger the payment. There's also more collaboration, and we have a better tenant/landlord relationship instead of just getting a bill twice a year or being in touch when something goes wrong. This scheme is about rewarding good practice that benefits the wider environment and those who live in it, as well as helping to address the climate and biodiversity crisis. So, for example, grazing the coastal slopes at certain times of year also benefits those who use the Wales coastal path, and increases diversity on the slopes. Historically this strip was just left so rank grasses and bracken took over.



Flowering Thrift © Ben Porter



Six-spot burnet on bird's foot trefoil © Ben Porter

3. Have you reduced your livestock numbers?

We have reduced our number of sheep but have about the same number of cows. However, we have changed our breed of cattle to be more suited to a grass-based system.

4. Has your food production/output increased?

It's probably a bit less, but not much. However, we are paid for the other benefits that we produce – like the benefits to pollinators etc. We are a farm business, so we have to be economically viable. Having the best hay meadows in the world just wouldn't work unless we were paid to do it. We have reduced our inputs - like the amount of animal food that is bought in, which is imported from around the world. In trying to work with what we've got; we reduce our carbon footprint and make the farm more resilient.

5. Has your view of hay meadows changed?

Yes. I used to think they were a waste of time and space as we just wanted to make as much silage as possible. Now I see how they fit in to the bigger picture – every part of the cycle needs looking after because there's a knock-on effect. For example, pollinators are important on the farm and need to have both habitat and forage throughout the year.

6. What value do the hay meadows have in your farm system?

Well, bottom line, we are paid to do it, so there's value there – we're relying on them for a living rather than a hobby. But we have seen a big value with the increasing dry summers – the meadows are in a location where the grass usually burns off, but the mix of meadow species are more tolerant to drought as many of them are deeper rooting. We especially saw how resilient they were this summer. The hay itself is also better for feeding the stock in winter and doesn't need wrapping in plastic. It isn't as good for fattening stock as ryegrass is but it's good nutritional value through the winter.

7. Would you have known how to restore a meadow beforehand?

No. I just thought a meadow was what you got if you neglected a field. Now I know the main components of a meadow and the processes taken to restore one.

8. Have you seen any changes in the wildlife?

I do need to take more notice; often it is what people tell me has changed! But I do notice the curlews and chough feeding in the big meadow, and plenty of swallows swooping over the fields for insects – and butterfly orchids appeared on the coastal slope this year which hadn't been seen for a long time.

9. What would you say to other farmers who are debating whether to get involved with the new scheme?

Don't knock it until you try it! Go in with an open mind and be willing to learn from the advisors. Be willing to give it a try – if it doesn't work you can adjust what you're doing.... there is flexibility. Don't bother, though, if you're just going to pick holes in it.

10. One last word?

'Farming and nature need each other. Without one you won't have the other'.



Spreading green hay at Cwrt in 2019, and the same meadow in 2022

Small holdings and privately owned fields

There are plenty of fields in Llŷn that are not in agricultural use, but which can be restored as meadows by the introduction of favourable management. An example of this is Gorlan Hen near Pengroeslon.

Gorlan Hen is a 300-year-old cottage which has a 5 acre meadow as part of the smallholding. This field has not been ploughed or agriculturally improved for at least 50 years, probably longer. The management prior to 2018 was fairly ad hoc, with an occasional hay cut and some grazing and although it was relatively diverse, it was becoming more and more rush dominated. It had a close call in 2018 when a new local grazier took over and nearly sprayed it with Round up, but thankfully a number of serendipitous events just saved it in the nick of time!

Since then an annual rhythm of management has been introduced involving a late summer hay cut, overwintering sheep grazing and occasional topping of the rushes early in the year prior to being left to grow, flower and set seed. This is carried out by an arrangement with a local grazier (who now understands its importance!).

It is probably one of the very few remaining ancient meadows in Llŷn and provides a stunning display of flowers throughout the summer, particularly ox-eye daisy, yellow rattle, common spotted-orchids, selfheal, sorrel, bird's foot trefoil and knapweed. To stand in this colourful meadow in midsummer, surrounded by the hum of insect life, is an incredible experience. Steve and Felicity, the owners, had an open day for the meadow group on 22nd June, on a stunningly beautiful day – captured in the images below.



Road verges

Many councils have started to adopt practices of good road verge management, as recommended in the Plantlife 'Good verge guide' <https://www.plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/publications/good-verge-guide-different-approach-managing-our-waysides-and-verges>. Gwynedd biodiversity officer, Hywyn Williams, shares with us Gwynedd's latest project aimed at increasing biodiversity on our road verges:

"Some of you who have travelled along the A499 and A497 in Gwynedd recently may have commented on seeing 'even more' roadside cones ensuring a safe working area for those operatives who are working on these roadside verges. However, you may also have noticed that the work didn't involve heavy machinery or digging equipment either.

Gwynedd Council (Highways and Environment Departments) are working in partnership to improve 8 roadside verge plots along the above highways in order to improve and promote the wildflower and pollinator habitats which are so important to us all.

Preparatory work has already begun on a new 'cut and collect' management regime for these sites, which will also include the introduction of locally harvested seed to encourage 'new wildflower meadows and habitats'. Gwynedd Council is extremely thankful to the Dolydd Llŷn community for their kind donation of locally sourced seed (which will be incorporated into the sites) ensuring that local provenance is fundamental to the success of the project.

The Council has also secured funding from the Gwynedd Nature Partnership to purchase new 'cut and collect' machinery which will provide staff with the appropriate equipment to expand its 'green space management for biodiversity improvement' in the future.

This new management of our roadside and green spaces will hopefully begin to reverse the past trends of habitat loss and if you would like more information on the above work or maybe suggest areas for 'new cut and collect' management, please contact hywynwilliams@gwynedd.llyw.cymru."



One of the new Rytech cut and collect machines, and a verge prepared ready for sowing (Hywyn Williams)

Community Meadows

The Mynytho community meadow is now in its second year and has been full of botanical surprises - a stunning greater butterfly-orchid appeared in the middle of the patch! Robert Parkinson from the National Trust ran another session for the pupils of Ysgol Foel Gron, looking at the wildflowers and insects in the meadow



Ysgol Foel Gron school session



Greater butterfly orchid in Mynytho community meadow, and the interpretation board funded by Plantlife



Wildflower meadows in Llanbedrog Playing Fields

Llanbedrog community council have also assigned an area of their playing field to be a wildflower meadow. A creation project was carried out this year, as Alaw Ceris, Chair of the community council describes:

The Llanbedrog Playing Fields Committee were very fortunate to receive specialist advice from Jo Porter over the summer months in order to start work on establishing wildflower meadows in Llanbedrog Playing Fields.

The field is situated at the heart of the village of Llanbedrog, and it has been a priceless amenity for the community and visitors alike. Unfortunately, however, over the last few years, its condition has deteriorated and so a Committee was formed with the aim of renovating and improving the area. Part of these improvement works involves establishing an area of wildflowers so as to improve the area's biodiversity, with benefits to nature and the community.

Thanks to support from the National Trust, a ryetech machine (below) was used to prepare the ground in the park where wildflower seeds were to be sown.



Following this work, 24 pupils from Years 3 and 4 of Ysgol Llanbedrog were invited to help us sow the wildflower seeds with local provenance in Llŷn that had been provided by Jo Porter. The pupils are working on nature so they were delighted with this opportunity to help us and learn about the importance of wild flowers. Following a discussion about the work of sowing the seeds and why we're doing this, everyone had a lot of fun sowing the seeds before jumping on them to make sure that they weren't blown away by the wind!

Mrs Jones, Headteacher of Ysgol Llanbedrog said: "We're very grateful for this opportunity for our pupils to take part in the process of planning and making improvements to the park. Our work on nature ties in brilliantly with these wildflower meadows. The next step will be for them to design scarecrows so as to prevent the birds from eating the seeds!"

The following week the pupils returned to create their scarecrows ... here we present Bryn and Beti, the Llanbedrog Playing Field scarecrows!

Alaw Ceris



Meadow Making on Llŷn 2022

It was another successful year for seed harvesting, with an abundance of yellow rattle-rich meadow seed being collected from Iwan Edgar's fields, a key donor site near Abererch, in early July. This was dried (thanks to Felin Uchaf for providing the space!) and then distributed to a variety of meadow creation and restoration projects across the peninsula, some of which are featured in this newsletter, including the road verge scheme and school's meadow project.

The National Trust also undertook a programme of meadow-making projects, using both brush harvested seed and green hay, harvested from donor sites on National Trust-owned land.

All this meadow restoration work has been made possible by funding from Plantlife, Gwynedd Council (Dawnsio ar y Dibyn), and practical help from the National Trust. Many thanks to all!



The brush harvester at work



Sieving the seed on site



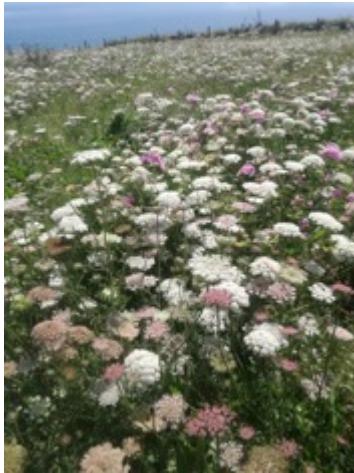
Yellow rattle rich meadow seed



A Rhiw meadow full of Common catsear



A Goldfinch in a meadow of Common sorrel © Ben Porter



Wild carrot



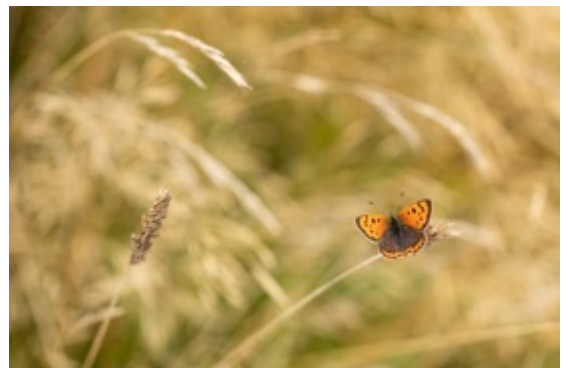
A species rich meadow



Common blue



An Ashy Mining Bee in a hay meadow © Ben Porter



Small copper butterfly © Ben Porter

Many thanks to all contributors, and to Haf Meredydd for translation. If you have any questions about Dolydd Llŷn or would like to be included in the mailing list, please contact Jo Porter bardseyjo@gmail.com

(Photos in the newsletter by Jo Porter unless otherwise credited.)