

PARISH GRASSLANDS PROJECT

Issue 7

April 2004

SPRING/SUMMER WALKS:

2.00, Saturday May 8th – John Foulkes, Rodmore Mill

2.30, Sunday 30th May - Jane Marshall, Abbey Passage Farm, Tintern

Saturday 31st July – John Childs, Cowshill Farm

See inside for more details

MACHINERY BID SUCCESSFUL

We are delighted to announce that our bid for funds from the Heritage Lottery Fund has succeeded, and we have been given permission to proceed with the purchase of meadow management machinery. We will soon be able to offer owners of fields help with their management, and an improved opportunity to understand and appreciate the local environment for all residents and visitors.

The committee as a whole has put a lot into this under the co-ordinating influence of Peter Chard, who deserves thanks for the effort he has been prepared to put in.

Together with Monmouthshire Meadows Group, our counterpart over the Wye, we will actually receive three grants, one from the HLF, another from a Welsh Sustainability Fund administered through the AONB office, and a third from the Forest of Dean District Council. Furthermore, we in the project have undertaken to give time on a voluntary basis. With these resources we will be able to buy machinery for grassland management; design and construct display boards; write and publish a booklet; and prepare 'how to' guides for grassland owners.

The machinery will enable fields to be cut for hay, or topped to restore grassland quality, and it will be particularly suitable for small fields on awkward ground with difficult access. It will be housed and operated by John Childs.

The Committee

Chairman:

George Peterken
Tel: 01594 530598

Vice-chairman:

Peter Chard
Tel: 01594 530513

Secretary:

Jim Swanson
Tel: 01594 516540

Treasurer:

Andy Rowlands
Tel: 01594 530741

Committee Members:

John Childs 530046
Jane Morgan 530215
John Josephi 530598
Jaye Simpson 530248
Mike Davis 531110

Newsletter:

Sally Secrett 530539

Anyone who thinks they have a use for it should in the first instance contact Peter Chard (01594-530513), who will co-ordinate use here and across the valley, and deal with the necessary paperwork.

If we can make this all work, we will soon be able to offer a 'complete' service for those who want help with managing their fields:

1. Free advice on suitable management from members of the committee, who can cover the range from botany and ecology to practical management and stock keeping. We will also soon have the first of a series of 'how to' guides, and eventually an illustrated booklet.
2. Hire of machinery for cutting hay and topping overgrown fields, and the labour to do the work.
3. Loan of cattle to graze the aftermath, with necessary care of the stock. This is John Childs' 'rent-a-cow' scheme. If there are no other solutions available, this would ensure that the aftermath growth is used and that the fields are in good condition by spring.
4. Assistance with entry to the DEFRA Stewardship Scheme, which will help to pay for 2 and 3, above. At present we know of 11 properties in the two parishes that are part of this scheme, and three more that have applied.

This promises to be a unique experiment in environmental management by a local community. We recently saw a report on grazing schemes for conservation throughout England and Wales, and ours were the only ones that do not revolve round a project officer employed by a local authority or conservation organisation at a cost to the tax payer. We will do our best to make it work and hope we still have the interest and support of the residents of Brockweir, Hewelsfield and St Briavels.

George Peterken
22 March 2004.

BOOK REVIEWS

A GUIDE TO STOCK FENCING by Andy Radford

Anyone who, like me, tackles DIY jobs with the tools in one hand and an instruction manual in the other, will appreciate this informative book which is detailed, well illustrated, easy to follow and - most importantly - easy to hold! Whether you need a fence that will protect large livestock such as cattle and horses, an enclosure for a few chickens, or a barrier to foil the escape attempts of your goats, this book has loads of practical, specialised advice. It tells you how to get started, precisely what you will need to complete the job, guidance on buying the correct materials and tools, fencing on slopes, across streams, on shallow or soft ground and how to add stiles and gates. It costs £14.99, hardback. Alternatively, both Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire Public Library Services have copies available for loan.

Jaye Simpson

BRITISH TRUST FOR CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS PRACTICAL HANDBOOKS

BTCV produce several excellent practical guides for walling, hedge management, fencing etc, with simple, step by step guides with explanatory diagrams.

Available to purchase online at www.btcv.org or telephone: 01302 572244

Jim Swanson—01594 516540

Do you know of a book that you think would interest members? Please e-mail your review to Jim Swanson at gloucester@fwag.org.uk for inclusion in the next newsletter

RECOMMENDED SUPPLIERS

For forest trees and hedging plants:

John Josephi recommends **Lynders Forest Nursery** at Upton Bishop, near Ross-on-Wye.

Tel: 01989 780212 Website: www.lynders.co.uk

For local provenance shrubs and trees, Jim Swanson recommends **Parks Farm Nurseries**, Ledbury Road, Newent, GL18 1DL.

Tel: 01531 820620 Fax: 01531 8214 email: parksfarm@msn.com

Do you know of a contractor or local supplier that you think would interest members? Please e-mail your review to Jim Swanson at gloucester@fwag.org.uk for inclusion in the next newsletter

MACHINERY REVIEW

I have a Countax series C600H garden tractor with a 36" field grass mulch deck. I had larger tractor wheels put on to cope with the steeper parts of my land. This has proved to be most satisfactory in topping the rank areas of my pasture. It also coped very well with the cutting of my "wild flower meadow", which is only cut once a year at the beginning of September. At this time the herbage is very long and very thick in places, the very tough clumps of grass required 2 mowings but the machine managed very well.

I have used the grass catcher to Hoover up the carpet of dead Oak leaves as my fields are surrounded by mature trees. This is an experiment to see whether the pasture will improve when it is able to breathe.

Jane Morgan – 01594 530215

Do you know of a contractor or local supplier that you think would interest members? Please e-mail your review to Jim Swanson at gloucester@fwag.org.uk for inclusion in the next newsletter

WHERE IS THE BEST GRASSLAND ON THE COMMON?

Which are the richest fields on the common for wild flowers, and how many different species do they contain? We can glean an answer of sorts from surveys carried out by a grassland specialist from the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust in 1994 and 2001, during which a list of the flowering plants, grasses, ferns, etc. was compiled for several properties.

The completed lists contained every species the surveyor noticed anywhere on the property, including trees, hedge species, and plants of scrubby corners, as well as the species found in the grassland itself, so they need some editing before they can be used to compare one grassland with another. I have therefore eliminated species such as hawthorn, dog's mercury and other species of boundaries, and restricted the counts to true grassland species. The results are given as a 'league table'.

Somewhat to my embarrassment, my own property leads the league with 75 different grassland species, but several others run it close, and the properties in the 'relegation positions' are not far below mid-table. Taken at face value, it seems that every property has an irreducible minimum of 40 or so common and widespread species, but some have an admixture of uncommon species that inflate the lists.

However, there is more to these numbers than meets the eye. First, the surveys were not equally thorough. For example, having listed the plants in our fields over the years, I simply gave my accumulated list to the surveyors, so the Beechwood House list may well be almost complete. Other properties, on the other hand, were looked at once, so there are probably many other species still to be found. The other factor is 'area': the larger properties will have more species than smaller properties, other things being equal. If we make allowances for size, Liz Rush's fields at Sylvan House and Roger Gaunt's field at The Nedge will ascend the league.

If we could survey all properties to equal intensity and make proper allowance for differences in acreage, I suspect we would find that the richest fields for plants would be found in three locations: (1) along the fringes of the Hudnalls woodland, where the soils seem more diverse, and include patches of wetter ground and lime-rich soils; (2) along the streams, for the same reasons, and (3) on the higher, steeper ground, where the soils seem thinner and more heathy. However, this pattern is not inevitable, for the way a field is used now and has been used in the past also affects how many species can be found: fields that have been ploughed and reseeded, or neglected for many years, tend to be the poorest.

So, this is not the 'end-of-season' league table. If anyone feels mildly competitive and would like to know where they come in the league, get in touch with someone on the committee, and we will try to arrange a survey. If you want to be at the top, your options are (1) arrange for optimal management, (2) buy more fields, (3) move.

- 75 Beechwood House
- 69 Sylvan House
Tyersall
- 65 Yewgreen Farm
- 64 Brooklands
Hadley
Harthill
- 63 Cherry Crofts
- 53 The Nedge
- 49 Harthill Cottage
- 48 Morgan's Cottage
- 46 Hopewell House
Copwell House
- 43 Harpfield
- 42 The Hollies
- 40) Timothy Lodge

George Peterken

SPRING/SUMMER WALKS

Saturday May 8th – John Foulkes, Rodmore Mill

A farm that has been in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme for over 5 years, John also has an alpine tractor that we can look at in operation.

Meet at Rodmore Mill at 2.00, (OS Grid Reference SO 582028)

Sunday 30th May - Jane Marshall, Abbey Passage Farm, Tintern

This is the farm just over the wireworks bridge in Tintern that everyone can see over the river as they drive into Tintern from Tintern Parva, where a Countryside Stewardship agreement has been in operation for several years.

Meet either at the wireworks bridge (OS Grid Reference SO 530003) at 2.30, or Mackenzie Hall at 2.15

NB: It is not possible to drive in over the bridge, so please park in Tintern and walk over.

Saturday 31st July – John Childs, Cowshill Farm

A repeat of last years very successful summer barbeque, once again kindly hosted by John and his family.

Details to be confirmed

WHATS DIFFERENT IN THE WOOLHOPE DOME?

□ talk by Rob Havard, Woolhope Dome project officer on February 24th, outlined some of the similarities and differences between this project and the PGP.

The areas have similar wildlife interests, both being a mosaic of neutral, acid and alkaline grasslands, wet flushes, hedges & orchards forming a landscape of small fields. Land ownership varies between farms, smallholdings and non farming residents with small acreages. This interest has long been recognised by conservation organisations and statutory agencies such as English Nature, and the visible decline in management prompted several to get together to raise the funds to employ a dedicated project officer to help resolve problems in the area. Funders include EN , EU Leader+, the Forestry Commission, Wye Valley AONB & the Wildlife Trust, who, with defra form the steering committee.

The first task was to identify the resources (a habitat map was produced), and underlying reasons for the lack of management:

- Best management requires money, management time and labour
- Lack of infrastructure for land management, e.g. fencing, water etc
- Lack of stock and husbandry skills
- Ageing population (farmers and residents)

Hence main targets for funding and project officer time

- 100% of costs of capital infrastructure to enable grazing
- Project management, i.e. organisation of contractors
- Machinery purchase to facilitate management
- Management payments for grazers and landowners *in addition to Countryside Stewardship*
- Marketing research and facilitation of local produce marketing to increase value of important wildlife habitats such as grassland
- Advice, training and awareness raising
- Facilitation and networking, and a unified voice for the area in discussions with policy makers and funders

Possible long term solutions

- Niche product marketing (food, timber, venison, 'crafts') – some market research carried out
- Grazing project – lack of funds has meant that this hasn't happened as yet—and encourage local farmers

Problems

- Only a 3 year project; land management must be sustainable beyond 3-6 years, as otherwise too expensive
- Need to be flexible, as every site is different, has different habitats & problems and therefore objectives
- Involve as wide a range of bodies and local people as possible
- Defra need to fund local grazing schemes to enable UK government to meet local Biodiversity Action Plan targets

The aim of this project is to conserve and enhance the landscape of the parishes of St. Briavels, Hewelsfield and Brockweir by maintaining and managing the semi-natural grasslands and associated features