

Weald Meadows Network

Autumn Newsletter 2018



Welcome to the first newsletter of the Weald Meadows Group.

The Weald Meadows Group aims to protect and enhance species-rich grasslands in the High Weald AONB by co-ordinating conservation action, advancing scientific knowledge and promoting best practice.

In this issue.....

Read about the new grassland enhancement trials at Wakehurst - Kew's wild botanic garden, and learn how the Sussex Botanical Recording Society is conserving our wildflowers in churchyards and cemeteries.

Get to know your new Local Wildlife Site Officer for Sussex, and discover why adder's tongue fern is disappearing from our meadows - is it just that we're not looking hard enough?



About the Weald Meadows Group

Over the past 25 years the High Weald AONB has been at the vanguard of meadow restoration, helping to stem the decline of traditional grasslands and ensure the successful establishment of new species-rich meadows on a landscape scale.

The newly-formed Weald Meadows Group, supported by a wide range of organisations and specialists, aims to build on past successes by focusing on scientific research, management, promotion and restoration of meadow habitats across the AONB.

Contact: iain.parkinson@highweald.org

A good year for adder's tongue fern...

Adder's-tongue fern (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) is an unusual plant of old grasslands and damp meadows. With its bright green, oval and upright frond, and its tall spike bearing the spores, adder's-tongue is unmistakable, but often under recorded due to its diminutive nature.

It usually appears between June and August, spending the rest of the year underground as a rhizome, but this year it emerged slightly earlier which made it more visible. Perhaps it was the warm early spring followed by a hard cold snap, or maybe the result of other meadow plants being held back - whatever the reason, it's been great to see so many thriving in our Wealden grasslands.



Adder's-tongue fern

Earlier this summer a large population of adder's tongue-fern was found at Reedens Meadows - a new 'Suitable Alternative Natural Green-Space' (SANGS) site for Newick. The area is approximately 29 acres of green open space on the western side of the village, and delivers a wonderful natural resource including woodland, wildflower meadows and a variety of walks.

Contact: Kim.Dawson@lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk

On the hunt for the Long-horned bee

The Long-horned bee is one of the UK's largest solitary bees. Males are extremely distinctive due to their long antennae. The bee was once widespread across southern Britain but now survives at just a few dozen sites nationally. It flies from mid/late May to late July/early August.

If you have spotted this remarkable insect please send details to Laurie Jackson at Buglife.

Contact: laurie.jackson@buglife.org.uk



Long-horned bee (*Eucera longicornis*)

Grassland enhancement field trials

A restoration field trial is being set up at Wakehurst - Kew's wild botanic garden, to showcase a range of grassland enhancement techniques.

Three different enhancement methods will be applied across large plots so that differences may be monitored by overlooking the whole area. The trials will monitor the establishment success of wildflower plugs, brush harvested seed and green seed (a variation on green hay).

A long-term monitoring programme will record the rank abundance of species that establish and these will be compared with quadrat records taken from the seed donor site at Valebridge Common Meadow at Bedelands Nature Reserve in Burgess Hill.



Enhancing West Field Meadows at Wakehurst in less than ideal conditions

Recent quadrat data (2m by 2m) from the first meadow enhancement areas show an increase from an average of 13 species in 2017 to an average of 16 this year.

The average for MG5a in the National Vegetation Classification is 22 species and Valebridge Common meadow (where the initial seed was harvested from) has an average of 33 species.

The research area will be managed in a traditional way by taking an annual hay cut followed by aftermath grazing using hebridean sheep that belong to Ashdown Forest.

Contact: Margaret Pilkington m.c.pilkington@sussex.ac.uk

Upper Rother and Dudwell Farm Cluster meadow surveys

Wildflower meadows and pastures are an integral part of the High Weald's landscape and provide a valuable habitat for wildlife, especially pollinators.

During May and June, a partnership of staff from the High Weald AONB Partnership, Kew at Wakehurst Place, Natural England and Buglife surveyed fields within the High Weald farm cluster area, looking for species rich grasslands and semi-improved fields with potential to be restored.

The data will be used to create an inventory to enable us to conserve, re-connect and enhance lowland grasslands by raising awareness of their wildlife value amongst landowners and developers, offering targeted management advice and providing landowners with data to support future agri-environment scheme applications.



'It's been great that landowners have been keen to find out more about the wildlife interest of their grasslands. We have been very lucky to be allowed to visit some fantastic and beautiful places. The highlights for me have to be the orchids, adders tongue fern and a good variety of dragonflies and damselflies.'

Ross Wingfield, Land Management Project Officer

Training events

The AONB Partnership delivered a series of meadow training events over the summer. Aimed at landowners and site managers, the courses have covered a range of topics including meadow creation, management, restoration, surveying and monitoring - and even scything. We are planning to run a similar programme in 2019.

Contact:

Iain.Parkinson@highweald.org



Meet your new Local Wildlife Site Officer for Sussex

Hello, my name is Dan Watkins and I am the new Local Wildlife Site Officer for Sussex. I come from a background in ecological consultancy, dealing principally with protected species in relation to development for a number of companies over the last twelve years. I have been a resident of Sussex since 2001 and currently live in Hove.



Over the past year, a partnership of local planning authorities and environmental organisations has come together, with a shared interest in establishing the Sussex Local Wildlife Site Initiative. The partnership has provided the funding for the LWS Officer post which is hosted within Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre at the Sussex Wildlife Trust.

The aim is to have a functioning LWS system which ensures LWS's can be accurately represented in Local Plans, given due consideration in the planning and development control process, and receive targeted management advice, with the ultimate aim of conserving biodiversity.

There are 637 LWS's in Sussex, so initially we will be focusing on surveying existing, high priority LWS's to determine whether the biodiversity interest features are still present, what condition the sites are in and whether they continue to meet the criteria for designation.

Contact: Daniel.Watkins@sussexwt.org.uk or 01273 497538

For general advice on wildlife please contact WildCall

Local Wildlife Sites

Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs) are non-statutory designated sites that contain features of substantive nature conservation value such as lowland meadows.

They were formerly known as Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (SNCIs) in Sussex.

LWS's are an important component of ecological networks providing refuges for wildlife, areas where special habitats can be maintained and ecological connectivity between sites and across landscapes.

And finally....

Burial grounds as potential Local Wildlife Sites

The Sussex Botanical Recording Society embarked on a new project in 2016 to record vascular plants in churchyards and cemeteries throughout East and West Sussex.

The recent records were compared with those collected in the 1980s and also analysed, using indicator species of ancient, semi-natural woodland and unimproved grassland.

The results showed an increase in vigorous species to the detriment of the indicator species. Of the 280 burial grounds surveyed, native orchids occurred in only 53 sites.

The Weald Meadows Group is exploring the possibilities of generating more interest in nature conservation in burial grounds and forming a dedicated conservation working group for High Weald sites.



Weald Meadows Group members

The Weald Meadows Group members are: Iain Parkinson (Kew at Wakehurst - Chair), Sally Marsh (High Weald AONB Partnership), Keith Datchler (People Need Nature), Ralph Hobbs (Natural England), Kate Ryland (Dolphin Ecology), Clare Blencowe (Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre), Dawn Brickwood (High Weald Landscape Trust), Laurie Jackson (Buglife), Margaret Pilkington (Emeritus, Senior Lecturer University of Sussex), Ted Chapman (UK Native Seed Hub Coordinator, RNG, Kew), Emma Hinton (Natural England), James Newmarch (East Sussex County Council). The Group is not exclusive and new members are welcome.

Meadow facts and figures

- There are 41.1km² (4122ha) of wildflower meadows in the High Weald, covering 2.8% of the AONB
- There are 2082 recorded wildflower meadows
- Good-quality *semi-improved* grassland constitutes 41% of all remaining grasslands