



Spring 2009 Newsletter

Meadows for the Future



Species-rich grassland is a scarce and threatened resource of high biodiversity value, as well as cultural and landscape significance. It is estimated that 97% of our wildlife-rich grasslands have disappeared over the last 75 years. This in turn has threatened numerous species associated with them, including many wildflowers, butterflies and birds.

There are now only around 15000 hectares¹ of lowland meadows, and 30000 hectares¹ of lowland dry acid grassland surviving in the UK. Important concentrations of both are found in the Weald of Sussex, Kent and Surrey, with almost 10% of the UK's lowland meadow resource found in Sussex. Besides being severely diminished in area, most wildlife-rich grassland now occurs in isolated patches of less than 2 hectares, making these surviving fragments even more vulnerable.

In Sussex, the Weald Meadows Initiative works to ensure the long-term survival of this irreplaceable species-rich grassland in the Weald. This established partnership project provides practical support and management advice to owners of grassland to help secure their sustainable management and ensure they retain their interest.

Initially set up to pilot seed harvesting, the Weald Meadows Initiative is now in its thirteenth year. Over the last three years the project has focused on providing proactive advice to aid grassland owners on the Heathfield to Battle Ridge - a stronghold for species-rich grassland.

Successes of the project include providing management advice and support to over 600 grassland owners, covering some 855 hectares of grassland. The coordination of harvesting Weald Native Origin Seed continues, enabling creation and enhancement of local grassland sites. Assistance is also available to landowners with site surveys and audits, management plans, biodiversity assessments and monitoring.

In order to continue this vital work the Weald Meadows Initiative is looking for funding to continue the project beyond September 2009. For further information about the Weald Meadows Initiative please contact Dawn Brickwood, Weald Meadows Officer on meadows@highweald.org or 01580 879500, or visit the website: <http://www.highweald.org/text.asp?PageId=222>.

¹ UK BAP Website <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/>

Parish Hedgerow Surveys - Volunteer Opportunities *Peter Challis, Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre*

Hedgerows are an important part of the Sussex landscape, providing a species-rich habitat and a vital refuge and food supply for wildlife.

As part of the Hedgerow Habitat Action Plan for Sussex, the Sussex Hedgerow Inventory Project is tasked with finding out more about the hedgerows of Sussex. The emphasis of our research has revolved around the surveying of hedgerows in stratified, random ¼ km squares across the Character Areas of Sussex. The core of this work has involved identifying the extent of ancient and/or species rich hedges, hedgerow trees, management regimes and associated features; the results have been recorded in a database and mapped on the Geographic Information System at Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre. This approach continues, particularly in the Wealden Greensand area, where our data remain deficient and where we are urgently seeking more volunteers.



Photo: Richard Burkmar



Photo: Sussex Wildlife Trust

We have decided that the main thrust should now move towards the surveying of hedgerows in local parishes or through local conservation organisations. The thinking is that local residents have a better understanding of their area, a closer relationship with local landowners and a vested interest in the wildlife and conservation value of their own neighbourhood. This approach may be of particular interest to groups who have already undertaken Phase 1 habitat surveys of their area

and wish to augment these. To assist local groups in getting started on any project they have in mind, Peter Challis, from the Sussex Hedgerow Inventory Project, would be prepared to spend a day with them to show how to set about the surveys; he can also provide them with mapping, survey sheets and other support. Whilst knowledge of native trees and hedgerows is helpful, it is by no means essential - again, help will be given. The only essential criterion is enjoyment of nature and the countryside.

For those who are new to hedgerow surveying, or prefer a more companionable day out, we shall be organising survey days at the Knepp Castle Estate in Shipley during this summer. Please get in touch if you wish to be involved.

If you are interested in learning more about hedgerows and hedgerow survey methods, a training day is being held at Sussex Wildlife Trust, Woods Mill on Friday 8 May 2009. For bookings, please contact Filma Dyer on 01273 497560.



For more information on the Sussex Hedgerow Inventory Project, the Sussex Hedgerow Habitat Action Plan or any of the above please contact Peter Challis, Sussex hedgerow Inventory Project, at the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre on 01273 492630 (Wednesdays only) or hedgerows@sussexwt.org.uk

Are you the South East's most Wildlife-friendly Farmer?



Photo: Hugh Clark/
Sussex Wildlife Trust

Farmers have a vital role to play in conserving a rich and healthy natural environment, through their management of the agricultural landscape. The RSPB, in association with BBC Countryside Magazine, Butterfly Conservation and Plantlife, is searching for the UK's most wildlife-friendly farmer, with a prize of £1000 available.

The Nature of Farming Award showcases the achievements of farmers providing habitats on their land and safeguarding wildlife through sympathetic farming methods.

To enter go to www.rspb.org.uk/farming, email nature-farming@rspb.org.uk or call 01767 680551. Entry to the competition closes on **31 March 2009**, with a shortlist being drawn up by a panel of experts before a public vote in the summer.

News

Biffaward: Flagship Scheme 2009



Biffaward have launched their 2009 Flagship Scheme. The Scheme aims to support projects of regional or national importance that will make significant steps towards improving biodiversity or cultural facilities. Grants of £150000 - £500000 are available. Applicants have until **1 July 2009** to submit their Expression of Interest. Projects

must be site-based, within 25 miles of a Biffa operation and ten miles of an active landfill.

Look out for

- **Protecting our Water, Soil and Air** - Defra have produced a new code of good agricultural practice updating the three former separate codes for water, soil and air <http://www.defra.gov.uk/farm/environment/cogap/pdf/cogap090202.pdf>

Upcoming Events

February 13-March 20: Birkbeck, University of London hold their latest series of free ecology and conservation studies lectures. The series will be all about freshwater. <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/ce/environment/ecssociety/index.shtml>

March 24-25: The ParkCity conference sponsored by CABI and Natural England will be held in London. The conference will look at the role of Green Infrastructure in creating sustainable towns and cities.

April 1: The Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management Conference in Leeds, Wildlife Crime: A Crime Like Any Other? The conference aims to help delegates better understand the wildlife legislation.

April 17-19: The 2009 Mammal Society Easter Conference and AGM will be held in Winchester. The conference provides opportunities to hear about new research and conservation work for mammals.

August 16-21: The 10th International Congress of Ecology will be held in Brisbane, Australia. The theme is Ecology in a Changing Climate, and ecologists from around the world will explore how global climate change has impacted and will further impact ecosystems and the services they provide to human communities.

September 1-5: The 2nd European Congress of Conservation Biology will be held in Prague. The theme is From Science to Practice, and aims to explore ways in which communication can be improved between conservation biologists, policy makers and land managers.

Is there something we should know about? Got an article you would like us to include?

Email Laurie with the details if you would like something included in a future newsletter. The deadline for submissions for the next edition is 22 May 2009.

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