



Dolydd Llŷn Meadows Newsletter 2021

Conserving, creating and sharing
meadows and wildlife corridors on Llŷn

Gwarchod, creu a rhannu dolydd
achoridoriau bywyd gwyllt yn Llŷn



Say Go to the Mow? When is the best time to cut grasslands?

Grasslands are a bit like Goldilocks – they need just the right amount of management to enable them to flourish. Whilst we may have enjoyed no mow May again this year, managing a wildlife-friendly grassland doesn't mean no cutting at all. Cutting the grass might seem like an odd thing for a plant conservation charity to suggest, but in fact it's a key part of the lifecycle of healthy grasslands. Cutting too much or too early or too late can lead to a loss of species, but too little cutting, or worse not cutting at all, will allow thug plants and too much scrub to dominate.

So what does just right look like for our Goldilocks grassland?

For a traditional meadow (or an area with tall grasses and wildflowers whatever its size), twice is nice. The first cut can take place anytime from late July until the end of September, just as the grassland turns a golden hue as the plants mature. The grass cuttings should be collected up and taken away too. The second cut of the year can happen anytime between then and Christmas, or even until February/March time.

Short back and sides and long on top?

Just as some of us might visit the hairdresser every once in a while for a new haircut, different cutting styles can give grasslands a lift too! Long grass might suit in some areas, but grass doesn't have to be long to be wildlife-friendly, and a variety of vegetation heights, or cutting styles, can work better in some spaces and boosts biodiversity.

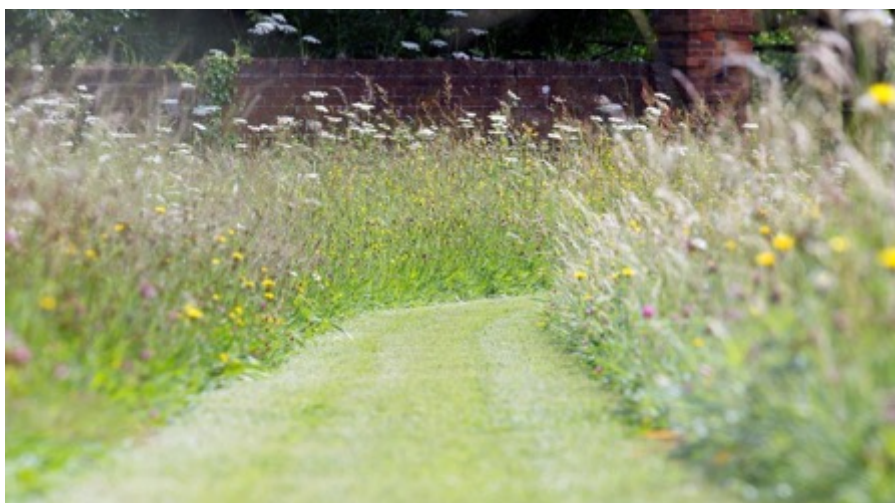
That's where the *Mowhican* comes in... it mixes both long and short grassland to provide the best banquet for pollinators. Plants such as white clover, bird's-foot trefoil, daisies and selfheal are low growing gems, and actually thrive by being cut roughly every month between April and November – think of it as a buzzcut for biodiversity!

You can combine these short-growing areas of grass with taller species such as ox-eye daisy, scabious and knapweed which can be left uncut from February to September, or even over the winter, to allow the creation of habitat for insects and their larvae.

This approach is great for lawns and greenspaces, keeping things looking attractive whilst providing a much needed helping hand for plants and pollinators, people and the planet.

So whatever style you decide to opt for, now's a great time to get cutting, keep our Goldilocks grasslands happy, and look forward to seeing more wonderful wildflowers in the years to come.

Kate Petty, *Plantlife*



2021 Update

Here is a round-up of news from various “patches of land” across Llŷn.

Tony and Karen Brand, Llangwnnadi

‘We own an eighteen acre small holding. We have a small flock of Torddu sheep and three horses. The previous owner had about 10 horses and thirty Hebridean sheep. As far as we can tell our land has not had any intensive management for at least 25 years. Towards the end of 2020 Phil Bellman visited us and suggested that some of our fields may be suitable for returning to a more traditional meadow. He introduced us to Jo Porter and she came to see us in October 2020.

Jo suggested a management plan for us and we were keen to put this into practice. Two fields appeared to be particularly favourable, one of 1.2 acres and one of 3.2 acres. The smaller field was cut for hay and then had four lambs grazing it up until December. When the hay had been baled two of the bales had collapsed and had been left to go off over the winter. The bales were cleared in the spring and the bare patches soon became covered in fat hen and sorrel.

At the end of July we hand collected some yellow rattle seed from Phil’s field, and used some brush-harvested seed from Plas Hendre collected via Jo.

Following a bout of rain the fat hen and sorrel were raked clear of two patches in the smaller field and some seed sown. A couple of weeks later I mowed two circles in the larger field approx.10 metres in diameter. I then raked the circles and following some more rain, seed was sown at the beginning of September.

During this summer you could see a very noticeable difference between our fields and those of our closest neighbour. Where ours were awash with yellow meadow buttercups and other plants I am not able to identify yet, our neighbours were a bland racing car green. I know that ours were full of butterflies and other pollinators, I suspect our neighbour’s were not.

At the top end of the large field there is a very overgrown pond. In the future it is hoped that we may be able to clear the pond, thereby improving the drainage and hopefully reducing the amount of soft rush in the field. The area around the pond was also quite heavily infested with himalayan balsam. We have spent the last couple of years trying to eradicate it and now appear to be succeeding. Next spring we should see the fruits of our labours but I suspect we shall have it for a couple more years yet’.

Pistyll Myfyr, Llaniestyn

‘In summer 2019, we decided to put a concerted effort into creating a more diverse wildflower meadow in our field. Historically the field had been used for intensive grazing of sheep, year-round. We already had a small variety of wildflowers present and a good foundation by which to develop the meadow.

With the help of our neighbour, we mowed and raked a few areas within the field and introduced some yellow Rattle (kindly supplied by Jo), and grazed with horses for a few weeks mid-winter.

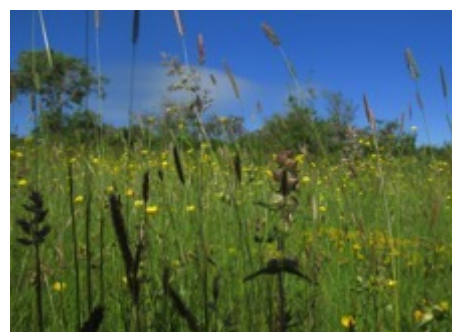
This summer we have definitely seen an increase in the number of wildflowers over the whole area and the Yellow Rattle appears to be multiplying nicely.

We are currently experimenting with collecting 50% of the yellow Rattle seed and distributing this to other areas of the field as well as donating seeds to other meadow enthusiasts.

We are delighted to be part of a movement that is helping to inspire and return wildflower meadows back to the peninsular’.



Photos by Tony Brand



Photos by Jonathan Woolley

Pant y Dŵr, Cefn Morfa – Rhys and Gwenan

'In 2017 we acquired Llain Fain, a two-acre field adjacent to our home. Though our existing garden has over the years been replanted to attract butterflies, birds and insects, this was an opportunity to create new habitats. At one time Llain Fain had been part of a dairy farm but for the previous 20 years had been less intensively farmed (little or no fertiliser) and mostly used for sheep grazing. The dominant grass in the sward was yorkshire fog, the fencing was in disrepair and the hedging was practically non-existent.

As we had bought the land at the end of the summer, we decided to allow sheep grazing into the autumn. During the first winter we renewed the fencing and planted blackthorn, hawthorn and hazel hedging as well as approximately 600 mixed native trees (as 1m whips) in half the field. The remaining acre was to be a wildflower meadow but instead of ploughing and reseeding we decided to sow 1Kg of yellow rattle seed and see how things developed.

In the spring we mowed twice (using a ride-on mower). The 2nd mowing was at the end of March. The meadow was then left to 'do its thing'. We were delighted to see that the much of the yellow rattle seeds had germinated and were giving a good display. The dominant grass was still yorkshire fog but there was also some sweet vernal and common bent growing here and there. Other plants that popped up that first spring were dandelion, cat's ear, common mouse ear, common sorrel, greater bird's-foot trefoil, and a few meadow buttercups. We even had a solitary common orchid! During the first week in September, we harvested 98 small bales of hay and then mowed the aftermath with a ride-on mower until the grass stopped growing towards the end of October.

In subsequent years we have continued with the same management, i.e. mowing in springtime until the end of March, cutting for hay at the end of August/beginning of September and then cutting with the ride-on mower again in the autumn. We have also used plug plants to introduce some additional plant species, including ox-eye daisy, musk mallow, meadow vetchling, black knapweed, ribwort plantain, white and red clover. In the autumn, we have also sown additional mixed wildflower seeds on to patches of the meadow which we had scarified until there was approximately 70% bare soil. To date this does not appear to have been successful, however, we are hoping to have better luck this year with the bag of locally collected seed that we were given to us by Jo.

As we had decided to create our wildflower meadow through our ongoing management regime rather than ploughing and reseeding at the start, it has been a slow process, but it does appear to be working. By this summer the yorkshire fog had been almost completely replaced by sweet vernal and common bent. The percentage (if not the variety) of wildflowers in the sward have also increased significantly. This year we cut the hay at the end of August with the significantly less yield of 63 bales, which may have been due to the dry weather but also to the depletion of soil nutrients resulting from our no fertilizer and no grazing approach.

There has been a dramatic increase in the wildlife in the field with large numbers of common field grasshoppers and seven-spotted ladybirds to be seen, and meadow brown, small skipper, common blue, and small copper butterflies. Over the last four years, we have also seen an increase in the number of moth species in our trap, namely burnished brass, drinker, elephant hawk moth and garden tiger, possibly because of the food provided by the meadow. This year, it has been pleasing to see the grass rivulet moth which feeds on yellow rattle. We have also spotted a few common grass snakes basking in the sun around the edges and in the young woodland, together with common voles and common shrew. Our plans are that over the coming years we will continue with our existing cutting/haymaking regime and hopefully obtain some locally sourced green hay from more established wildflower meadows to further increase our species count over the coming years.'



Common spotted orchid



Elephant hawk moth

Llŷn Community Meadows

Magnificent Meadows Wales /Gweirgloddiau Gwych Cymru is a Plantlife project that aims to increase the extent and resilience of species-rich meadows and grassland across Wales. One focus of this project has been to establish community meadows, providing opportunities for local communities to connect to, care about, and benefit from, meadows. On Llŷn, four sites have been funded by this project:

Llŷn Maritime Museum at St. Mary's Church, Nefyn

The churchyard surrounding Nefyn maritime museum has the potential to offer an example of species rich grassland, as it already consists of a varied sward with a variety of flowers and is rich in rare grassland fungi ('waxcaps'). Previously the whole churchyard has been mown regularly throughout the growing season, preventing many of the plants from flowering or setting seed. A suggested management plan was drawn up, in consultation with the management board and the groundsman. This involved dividing the churchyard into zones which would receive different management throughout the year: some areas are mown more regularly, particularly at the front of the church, whilst other areas are left to grow, flower and seed during the summer before cutting and collecting in the autumn. As a result of this management, the churchyard has been full of flowers and buzzing with insects this year!

Hopefully some yellow rattle seed that was introduced into patches during the autumn will also germinate and add its meadow making influence to the churchyard.



Felin Uchaf Centre, Rhoshirwaun

Felin Uchaf is a visionary social enterprise and lively community hub consisting of unique eco-builds such as traditional round houses, organic gardens, the beginnings of a community café and is an education centre committed to passing on traditional skills and crafts.

The site is already a haven for wildlife and has a variety of habitats that merge with the gardens and surround the eco buildings.

Many trees have been planted over the years which provide wide shelter belts and woodland glades. There are plenty of grassland patches across the site, which could be managed to favour biodiversity and the development of species rich grassland. Most areas have become dominated by coarse grasses, thistles and the encroachment of brambles.

One specific grassland area was chosen as a focus to become a meadow. The patch was flailed throughout the summer to weaken the creeping thistles.

In late August, the field was mown, the arisings raked, and then bare ground was created using a tine harrow, followed by a high set rotovator. Strimmers with scarifying heads were also used to create circles of bare ground.

Two seed sources were used: green hay from a nearby meadow, and locally sourced brush-harvested seed which was rich in yellow rattle.

We look forward to seeing how the meadow develops next year!



Nant Gwrytheyrn

The National Welsh Language and Heritage Centre is located in a stunning location, on the site of a former quarry and Victorian village. The centre attracts both visitors and locals alike, who enjoy the beautiful location, benefit from the Welsh language school and the café and conference facilities.

The steering committee were keen to explore setting aside some areas of grassland on the site which could be managed to become more species rich and be mini meadows. Most of the grassland was previously mown regularly throughout the growing season. In consultation with the management and the groundsman, some areas were chosen to be set aside during 2021 and a suggested plan was developed which involved leaving some areas to grow, flower and seed before cutting and collecting in early autumn. Yellow rattle seed was also introduced into these areas in the autumn.

These areas will be managed in a similar way in coming years and will hopefully become more flower rich as a result, adding to the biodiversity of the already beautiful location.



Mynytho Community Meadow

The development of this has been supported by Llanengan Community Council. The focus is a square of grassland, just below the playground which is visible from the main road and is close to Ysgol Foel Gron and the Village Hall.

Previously this grassland has been cut annually at the same time as the village green and Foel Gron heath, but the cuttings have not been removed. When left to rot in situ, the arisings add more organic matter to the soil and raise the nutrient level – which favours grass growth. Therefore, a thick thatch had built up which smothered many of the wildflowers, and tussocks of coarse grass had started to take over. In order to remove this thatch of coarse grass, a machine called a Rytech flail mower (with thanks to National Trust) was used to cut the grass right down to bare ground in April. The machine also collects the cut grass at the same time.

The grassland was then left to grow over the summer and a path regularly mown through the middle. It was full of surprises as flowers, meadow grasses and ferns that had been hidden in the soil bank were given a chance to grow and flower. The meadow was left until late September before cutting – this allows all the flowers to grow and set seed. A group of volunteers then helped to rake up the cut grass which was composted in piles.

In early October, Robert Parkinson from the National Trust organised an activity to educate the children from Ysgol Foel Gron about meadows. They then helped to sow yellow rattle seeds into small patches of bare ground across the site and hopefully will be involved in monitoring the wildflowers next year.



Mynytho Community Meadow



Raking up the cut grass in September



Pupils from Ysgol Foel Gron learning about meadows



Tŷ'n Don Mason Bee Site

The dune area at this eastern end of Porth Neigwl is one of 2 remaining UK locations for the large mason bee (*Osmia xanthomelana*). The other site is Porth Ceiriad, within the same Special Site of Scientific Interest. The bee populations at both sites are small, with maximum counts of 40 females at Porth Neigwl and 23 females at Porth Ceiriad.

The main pollen source for the females is common bird's foot trefoil.

This meadow creation project has focussed on two grassy fields adjacent to the mason bee nesting sites, owned by Ralph and Janet at Tŷ'n Don.

The process involved scarifying the surface of the fields in August with a Rytech flail to create bare ground, and then spreading both green hay and brush harvested seed from local donor sites. Plug plants of bird's foot trefoil that had been cultivated from seed collected from the dunes were also planted in the fields in October. The site will be managed with sheep and cattle grazing over winter, shut off during the summer months to grow and flower, and then a hay cut and harvest taken in mid to late August.

The fields are just inland from the coastal path, so keep an eye open for how these meadows progress in the next few years!

This is a part of the Tir a Môr project Managed by Cyngor Gwynedd, funded through the Welsh Government's Sustainable Management Scheme.



Mason bee (by Ben Porter)



Scarifying with a Rytech flail mower



Spreading the green hay



Planting out the bird's foot trefoil



Aftermath grazing with cows

Natural Seeding Network

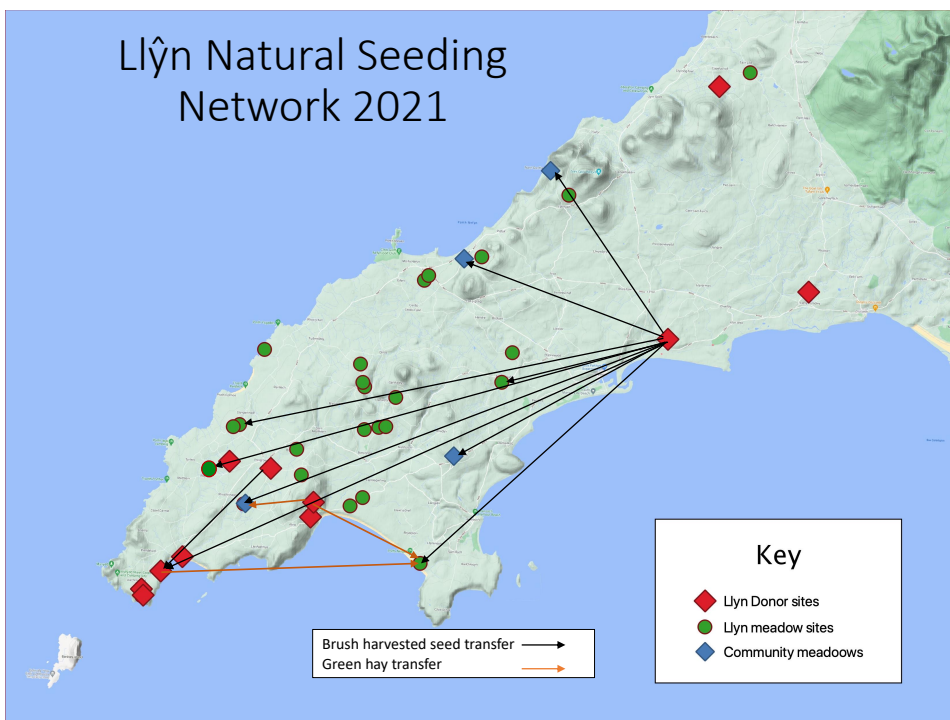
Why is local seed important?

Many meadow restoration projects currently use a generic wildflower mix bought from commercial sources, many of which contain a high proportion of annual and non-native species. Seed mixes of traceable UK provenance are still unlikely to be sourced locally. There are only four seed providers that sell seed of known provenance in Wales, all of which are small-scale operations.

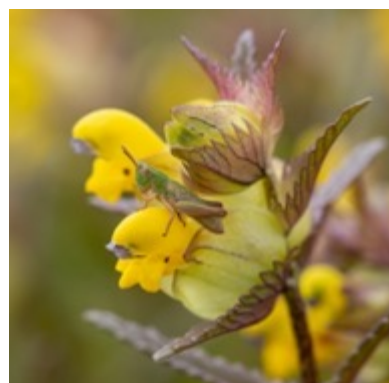
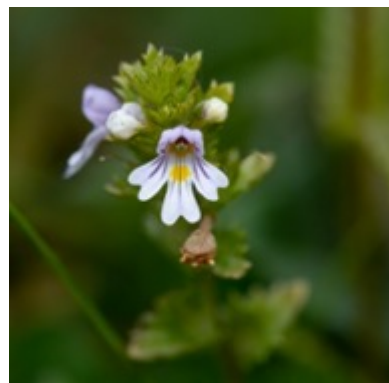
Plantlife advocate “keeping the wild in wildflower”, to preserve the distinctiveness of our local flora by using natural seeding techniques wherever possible when restoring or creating grassland. As a restoration method, natural seeding is ecologically more robust – it allows seed to be collected from a local site that matches the soil, climate and habitat of the receptor site. It will therefore be typical of the genetic variation found in the wild in the local area. This variation will include traits that have adapted to local conditions.

On Llŷn, the aim is to identify and increase the number of wildflower meadows that can provide local seed for making more meadows locally. This year, a brush-harvester was used to collect seed from some meadows at Plas Hendre near Aberech that belong to Iwan Edgar. This seed was used for most of the projects that have been mentioned in this newsletter, as well as the on-going meadow restoration projects on National Trust tenanted farms such as Cwrt farm.

Using brush-harvested seed proved to be the most reliable method this year - the warm, dry conditions in June accelerated the flowering and ripening of many meadows so that there was a mismatch in timing between green hay provision and meadow creation projects.



Brush-harvested seed containing lots of yellow rattle and eyebright



How to make a meadow with native wild flowers

Even if you only have a small area, you can enjoy a meadow full of native wild flowers. Your local wildlife will thank you for it. All you have to do is mow differently...

Choose an open, sunny area for your meadow, with no nettles or brambles. Then take a closer look in spring and summer – what's already growing there? A good meadow can be home to more than 100 different grasses and flowers.

If your area is bare ground or has fewer than five wild flowers



CREATE a meadow

In late summer or early autumn, cut the grass short, create bare ground and seed the area

- You'll need a mower, strimmer or scythe and a rake to collect the mowings because if left, they will decompose and enrich the soil with nutrients. Wild flowers thrive in nutrient-poor soil.
- You can compost the mowings or create [habitat piles](#) to encourage other wildlife.
- Create at least 50% bare ground by raking vigorously or by using a hand scarifier that can be rented. [Larger areas](#) are best done with a harrow.
- If you have a larger area and know a local farmer, you can seed the area using [green hay](#).
- Or you can buy native wildflower seeds from your local seed supplier. Double-check the seed is not sourced from outside the UK. Read '[Keeping the wild in wildflower](#)' to find out more.
- Try mixing your seed with sand for easier spreading. Sprinkle and gently trample in. During dry spells, water if possible, but don't wash away the seeds!
- In the coming months, pull up any creeping thistle and dock, or cut the flower heads off before they set seed. These can spread fast and smother wild flowers.
- Don't worry if your meadow looks a bit plain in its first year. Many native perennials take a couple of years to establish.

From the second year onwards follow the annual management plan

If your area has more than five different wild flowers already



ENHANCE a meadow

If you already have some wild flowers present, simply follow the annual plan below to see even more flowers return over time

