

# Gwent Wildlife Trust Wildlife Winners Update for 2010



## Tell me more about Wildflower Meadows

Wildflower-rich meadows are an important and attractive feature of the landscape in Gwent. Old meadows can provide home to a large variety of colourful variety of wildflowers such as hay rattle, eyebright and orchids, and also support butterflies, bumblebees and waxcap fungi. However in recent years over 95% of our wildflower meadows have been lost, making the conservation of those remaining ones especially important.



## Meadows need management!

GWT is lucky to care for some of Gwent's best remaining meadows including the wonderful Pentwyn Farm and Newgrove meadows near Monmouth and Solutia meadows near Newport.

To thrive, meadows require special management. If left alone meadows will eventually turn to scrub and then woodland, therefore they require traditional cutting and grazing regimes to maintain their character and encourage species diversity. A typical meadow regime involves cutting for hay in late July and grazing the aftermath in the autumn. The following spring the fields are shut up again for hay. Grazing after the hay cut helps to keep coarse, palatable grasses in check and light trampling creates pockets of bare soil for seed germination.

## Using local wildflower seed to help restore our meadows

To encourage wildflowers in a meadow, the use of traditional and sympathetic management techniques is always recommended in the first instance and over time can produce some impressive results. However in certain cases, for example isolated grasslands, where no natural seed source exists nearby to colonise the site it may be beneficial to use other techniques such as introducing wildflower seed. It is crucial that only local wildflower seed is used, to preserve local genetic diversity and also increase the chances of successfully establishing wildflowers.



Although old meadows can never be exactly recreated, with careful site selection, patience and a long term management commitment, colourful wildflower meadows can be successfully nurtured in many places.

# Gwent Wildlife Trust

## Wildlife Winners

### Update

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#### Where has your money been spent?

Wildlife Winners has helped to support the use of GWT's seed harvester. This special machine (shared with the Monmouthshire Meadows Group) is used to collect seed from wildflower-rich meadows in Gwent, ready for sowing on sites which are less diverse and in need of a little help. During the late summer of 2010 wildflower seed was harvested by GWT Reserves Officers from Pentwyn Farm and Magor Marsh meadows before being sown on nearby poorer fields.



#### Three steps to wildflower seed sowing....

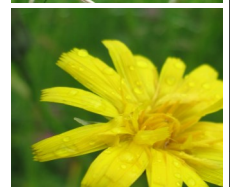
##### Step 1: Collecting, drying and sieving the seed

Using our specially designed seed harvester we were busy collecting seed in late July. Seed needs to be harvested at just the right time to collect as many different ripe species as possible. The seed harvester is towed by a quad bike and special brushes gently brush the seed from the flower heads into a collecting bin. Making full use of the hot sunny weather the seed was then dried, before being sieved to remove as much chaff as possible. This is quite a time-consuming process so only small amounts of seed can be collected!



##### Step 2: Preparing the ground and sowing the seed

Factors such as low soil fertility, an absence of weeds and not too many coarse grasses, with some bare ground all increase the chances of establishing wildflowers from seed. Before sowing the seed, receptor sites are grazed heavily and/or harrowed to remove dead grass material and expose bare ground and create space in the vegetation for wildflowers to grow. Seed is then scattered by hand.

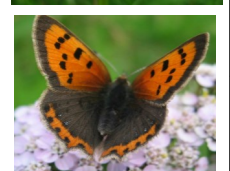


Seed was sown on poorer fields at GWT's Magor Marsh and on Wyeswood Common. It will be exciting to see what wildflowers appear on these grasslands in Spring.



##### Step 3: Long term Management

Simply sowing seed is not enough; there are no guarantees when sowing wildflowers and no instant meadows. Inevitably some species will do better than others and the number of wildflowers will vary from site to site and change from year to year as the meadow matures. To support the process as much as possible it's important that sensitive long term management of the site is in place.



In year one sites ideally need to be cut twice, and the cuttings removed, once in Spring and once in late Summer to prevent vigorous grasses out-competing the wildflowers. In following years a hay meadow regime should be employed with a hay cut in late July followed by some light aftermath grazing in September/October.

