

The National Meadows Group Conference

Hosted by Marches Meadow Group (MMG)

<https://www.marchesmeadowgroup.com/>

On 15th November 113 representatives from meadow groups and other organisations gathered at Norbury Village Hall for the first national meadow groups conference. Delegates came from as far afield as Hampshire, Wye Valley, Salisbury, Cumbria and Merseyside. The conference was organised by Marches Meadow Group (MMG) committee member Janet Cobb, and was sponsored by the Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust (<https://www.shropshirehills-nl.org.uk/help-to-look-after/shropshire-hills-landscape-trust>) and supported by Middle Marches Community Land Trust (<https://middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk/>)

The conference has had a long incubation. Back in 2016 MMG's second guest speaker was George Peterken, best known as a woodland ecologist but the author of the book *Meadows* and a leading light in the Parish Grasslands Project (PGP), a meadow group in St. Briavels in the Wye Valley. In his talk George explained how PGP had abandoned its hay-making service as it couldn't sustain the financial losses – a worrying thought for the recently established MMG hay-making service! Later MMG was frequently compared to Herefordshire Meadows, which seemed to be operating at a much larger scale and with paid staff. These comparisons led to thoughts about how other meadow groups were organised and funded, but until Janet's conference organising skills came along, we hadn't taken the plunge of bringing those groups together.

The conference was therefore designed to explore how the various meadow groups operate, including how they are organised and funded.

These talks are now posted on the MMG website.

The afternoon was a discussion of whether there was a need for a national meadow groups network and, if so, which organisation would be best placed to host the network. The break-out groups concurred that there was such a need and that, if it was willing, Plantlife would be the best host. Prior to the conference meadow groups had been asked to complete a data-gathering questionnaire and the collated results will also be posted on the MMG website.

Due to the generosity of the Shropshire Hills Landscape Trust and the donations from delegates the conference costs were covered. Feedback has been entirely positive, with comments such as:

"It was a really inspiring day"

"Many thanks again for an excellent day"

"Thanks so much for the invite and for a great conference the other day! It was great to meet so many people who love grasslands!"

"Every aspect of the event was excellent and I very much enjoyed being part of it"

Spin offs from the conference so far include

- Two offers of hosting a conference next year (Cornwall & Salisbury)
- Connecting seed producers
- Flagging up with Plantlife the thoughts of delegates that it should be the key organisation
- Conference report
- Analysis of the questionnaires and key themes from the discussion session
- Thoughts on a churchyard conference

In summary, it was a great day that led to much networking and discussion of the future for meadow groups that should have a positive impact on meadows throughout the country.

Marches Meadow Group board

Shropshire Hills National Landscape TRUST – REPORT 2024

Three site visits and conservation work support by Marches Meadow Group (MMG) at 3 sites in the Shropshire Hills

1. Norbury Hill, Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary butterfly in partnership with MMCLT and National Trust

MMG support with planting of Marsh Violets food source

Our marsh violet planting project was featured on the BBC last week!

We were very happy to welcome BBC Shropshire reporter Ellen Knight to one of our marsh violet planting sessions last week. Ellen joined Stepping Stones staff & volunteers and representatives of Middle Marches Community Land Trust (the landowners for this session) on Norbury Hill to hear about the violet planting work we're doing to help small pearl-bordered fritillary butterfly.

The result was a [lovely article on the regional BBC news page which you can read here](#), featuring some of our fantastic volunteers.

There was also a 4-minute feature on Radio Shropshire - you can [listen on BBC Sounds here](#) - including interviews with volunteers who were helping with the planting. It's great to hear how much the volunteers enjoy being involved with this work and that they feel like they are making a difference.



2. MMG support for work with Bilberry Bumblebee

Rare bumblebee numbers are rising in Shropshire following a successful project to restore old hay meadows.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cm52vrlz133o>

The National Trust is leading Stepping Stones, an initiative which aims to reconnect isolated patches of wildlife habitat across the Long Mynd and Stiperstones.

Jinlye Meadows, on the Long Mynd, is now thriving with wildflowers and insects and as a result, the population of bilberry bumblebees has increased.

MMG Volunteers were asked to join the project to continue the work across the county. Wildflower-rich meadows mean insects and bumblebees are thriving



3. MMG work to support Devils Bit Scabious

Marches Meadow Group (MMG) is the Devils Bit Scabious champion for the Species action plan.

<https://middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Devils-bit-scabious-Species-Factsheet.pdf>

MMG Devil's-bit Scabious workshop took place on 24th August.

Small grant of £174 obtained from Severn Trent for seed and plant plugs – these are being distributed across MMG members to either grow on for planting or planting out direct as ready - made plant plugs.

