



Spring 2021 Newsletter

www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk



There are loads of things to share in our Spring newsletter this year. It's been a busy 6 months for us and we have some exciting things to announce. See below for our headline news stories about winning the Ecover Fertilise the Future grant, the launch of our Arts and Crafts competition, and our Community Arts Project in Worcestershire. Along with updates on research, our 'shoots to roots' drawing, staff changes, 2021 conference dates and a special article on the Cotswolds Glorious Grasslands project, there's a lot going on.



Berkshire
Buckinghamshire
Oxfordshire



Our project 'Meadows for the climate' with BBOWT and Long Mead, wins Ecover Fertilise the Future Funding



Long Mead's Thames Valley Wildflower Meadow Restoration Project will be restoring 50 hectares of meadow along the Thames through the Ecover Meadows for the Climate project. We will also be collecting soil samples from here, and other sites to help in our campaign to get species rich wet grasslands prioritised in the path to net zero, as an excellent Nature Based Solution. Photo - Catriona Bass

We are very excited to reveal that working in close partnership with the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) and Long Mead's Thames Valley Wildflower Meadow Restoration Project (TVWMP), we have secured a significant grant from Ecover's 2020 Fertilise the Future competition.

Over the next three years, years, the Ecover grant will fund the restoration of 50 hectares of species-rich floodplain meadows by Long Mead's TVWMP, contributing to the continuous corridor of connected meadows along the River Thames above Oxford that TVWMP began in 2018.

We will collect nearly 500 soil samples from ancient meadows, restoring meadows of different ages and arable fields to evidence the soil carbon storage value of floodplain meadows, and to demonstrate how they can be used as a nature based solution in mitigating climate change. We will also carry out botanical and invertebrate surveys to show how floodplain meadows increase in diversity over time since restoration, both at the new restoration sites, and at longer term restoration sites at BBOWT's Chimney Meadows National Nature Reserve.

Speaking of why the project is so important, Professor Nathalie Seddon, one of the Ecover judges and Director of the University of Oxford's Nature-based Solutions Initiative said:

"This project focusses on a beautiful, biodiverse but now very rare ecosystem in the UK, floodplain meadows. It is an inspiring and deserving winner of this Ecover award for many reasons. It is well planned, based in strong local partnerships, and involves collaboration across science, policy and practice. The project also has a scientifically robust methodology for evaluating the multiple societal and ecological benefits of floodplain restoration over time, for example in terms of carbon, biodiversity and flood abatement, as well as for local communities, and has great potential for scaling in the UK and beyond."

To find out more, visit our webpage

<http://www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk/projects-and-events/ecover-fertilise-the-future>

We will collect 480 soil samples from 20 sites at 4 different depths to compare carbon storage values between ancient meadows, restoration meadows, and arable fields. Photo - Clare Lawson



We will supplement restoration fields with plug plants grown by Long Mead's care-farming programme.

Green hay will be spread on prepared fields and we will record the changes. This picture shows Long Mead wildflower seed being spread with a manure spreader as part of TVWMP restoration of Christ Church Meadows in 2020. Photo - Catriona Bass





Take part in our 2021 Floodplain Meadow Arts and Crafts competition



Calling all artists! The OU and the Floodplain Meadows Partnership have launched an Arts and Crafts competition to help raise awareness of the UK's diminishing floodplain meadows.

Found throughout Britain's river valleys, floodplain meadows are resilient to floodwaters and can contain more than 40 different plant species per one metre square. Throughout spring and early summer, meadows are awash with wildflowers, humming with insects and the birds that depend on them. Yet sadly, 97% of meadows have been lost in the last 100 years – resulting in biodiversity decline, loss of space for flood and soil carbon storage, and lost access to our rural history.

The competition

Funded by the Morgan Family Bursary Fund, and the William Dean Trust, the Floodplain Meadows Arts and Crafts competition 2021 invites all types of artists and crafters to help raise awareness of floodplain meadows and how they can be part of a package of natural climate solutions.

Prizes include a £250 Field Studies Council (<https://www.field-studies-council.org/>) voucher. Entries will be featured in an online art exhibition and the 12 winners will be included in a calendar for 2022. We are hoping to run a physical exhibition for as many submissions as we can (subject to COVID restrictions).

To enter:

1. Visit a floodplain meadow between April 2021 and 28th August 2021
2. Create a piece of art or craft based on your visit
3. Find out more and submit your entry online before midday 28th August 2021 by visiting: <http://www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk/projects-and-events/art-competition-2021>

You can learn more about floodplain meadows and the OU and the Floodplain Meadows Partnership's ongoing work to research, manage, promote and restore these special spaces at: <http://www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk/>

For any queries, please contact Olivia.nelson@open.ac.uk

FLOODPLAIN MEADOWS ARTS COMPETITION 2021

The Open University and Floodplain Meadows Partnership are inviting you to submit artwork which celebrates the importance and beauty of the UK's floodplain meadows.

These spaces are home to a diverse range of species and provide essential space for flood and soil carbon storage. Yet sadly 97% of meadows have been lost in the last 100 years. We'd love you to get inspired by floodplain meadows near you and to help raise awareness of just how vital they are.

1 Visit a floodplain meadow

Here's a map: www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk

2 Create a piece of art based on your visit

Photography
Poetry & Creative Writing
Drawing, Painting & Mixed media
Film, Sound & Music
3D/sculptural e.g. ceramic/knitted/wire
Other

These are just ideas, feel free to use your imagination!

3 Find out more and submit your entry online

Before midday 28th August 2021

<http://bit.ly/floodplains2021>

The prizes

Prizes include a £250 Field Studies Council (FSC) voucher and fabulous meadow produce.

www.field-studies-council.org

Shortlisted entries will be featured in an exclusive art exhibition and the 12 winners will be included in a calendar for 2022.

There are more prizes to be announced soon!



2021 FMP Conference dates

Our conference this year will be online on 13th-14th and 15th October. Please keep it free for us. The winners of the Arts and Crafts competition will be announced at the conference. Additionally, we will be covering a range of subjects including meadows as nature based solutions, soil carbon and natural flood management, a floodplain meadow question time/surgery, session and restoration case studies and techniques. Some more surprises in development.



Take part in a community art project with our 'Beauty and Utility Community Arts Project' with Meadow Arts and Wychavon District Council

We are working on a very exciting community arts project to explore the potential for art to engage a wider audience and also to see if creating art works can help to promote our policy messages. To do this, we have teamed up with Meadow Arts, Wychavon District Council and Friends of Avon Meadows (FoAM) to develop an arts project based around Avon Meadows in Pershore, a site that is managed by FoAM and is undergoing restoration to a more species rich meadow.

Meadow Arts has commissioned three Creative Practitioners from their network to develop a series of projects that engage with the community, reflect the seasons and capture the changing environmental conditions and biodiversity of Avon Meadows. The project will run throughout the seasons of 2020-21.

The artworks are intended to be a love letter to the site and the wider notions of beauty and utility associated with the ancient use of floodplain meadows in managing flood water, providing sustainable land management and community benefit.

'The Rivers Breathing' by Andrew Howe



The Creative Practitioners are:

1. Andrew Howe

The first Creative Practitioner to work at the site over the winter period is Andrew Howe, who plans to teach people how to create their own paper from reeds and other plant materials, in online workshops during the winter lockdown.


Visit Andrew's blog to read the full piece and see more images photographed on-site:
andhowenow.wordpress.com/2020/12/21/avon-meadows-beauty-and-utility/

Andrew's finished piece can be seen in the photograph above. It's called 'the Rivers Breathing' and relates to the themes of flooding and the meadow's role in natural flood attenuation or "breathing space" of the river, alleviating peak flows downstream. It also references biodiversity which is boosted by the seasonal flooding and distribution of nutrients. He uses plant materials to make paper for his artwork, and dyes

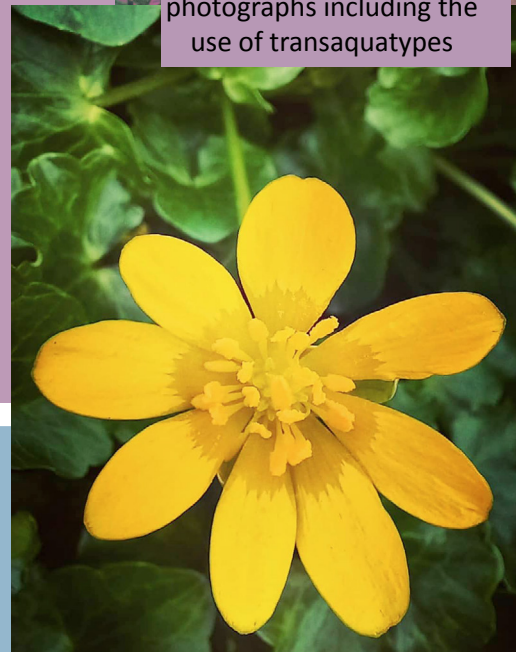
and pigments derived from plants, berries, soil and other materials gathered from the Avon Meadows. More images are available here <https://www.instagram.com/p/CMRh3ZICOD/>

Join Andrew Howe in his Ecoprinting workshop to find out how to do eco-printing and making marks with dyes, using natural materials gathered from your local green space or garden. Link here <https://www.meadowarts.org/events/ecoprinting-workshop>.

2. Melanie Woodhead is planning regular visits to the site during the spring, connecting and engaging with the space to create a photographic series during March to May and experimenting with digital and alternative photographic processes such as transaquotypes, anthotypes and chlorophyll prints. She will also create a site-specific piece incorporating a series of cloches filled with botanical material, found objects and water that will be clustered like dwellings. These may be partially submerged in the reeds, reflecting the rising and falling flood water and the link between the domestic and managed wild space that the floodplain meadows occupy. You can follow the unfolding project on Instagram @melanie.woodhead and through this series of blog posts on www.artandgardening.wordpress.com. Melanie is producing weekly photo prompts during April. There have been two photo prompts so far on social media, and they go out each Thursday to encourage people to share their photos on themes related to the project at #beautyandutility



Examples of Melanie's photographs including the use of transaquotypes



3. Kate Raggett will be working on site in June/July, hopefully straight after the hay has been cut and removed. She will be creating a medium scale land art drawing in the South Meadow using sheeps fleece from a local farm, and running community workshops to create a figurative land drawing of some of the wildlife that inhabits the meadows, outlined in fleece and filled in using natural foraged materials from the meadows and local gardens.

Kate is a Herefordshire based Land and Environmental Artist who makes earthwork drawings using natural found materials to express the sensation and deeper experience of being in the landscape. The earthwork drawings are temporary, site-specific works made in direct response to the rhythms and patterns of the materials used and land they are sited within. The drawings are not preconceived but emerge in the moment of their making following the flow of their natural environment.

As well as exhibiting her work Kate undertakes public and private commissions. Kate also runs public events inviting people of all ages and abilities to participate in making community earthwork drawings together which often take the form of large-scale mandalas. The aim of the workshops is to help people find a greater connection to the land and to re-discover their ability to play on a creative level



Keep up to date with the artists plans and the project here <http://www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk/projects-and-events/community-arts> or here <https://www.meadowarts.org/meadow-projects/beauty-and-utility>

Example of Kate Raggett's work - a community Mandala outlined with sheeps fleece and filled in using foraged natural materials from around the site c. 20ft diameter.

Spring has finally arrived and we are very pleased to hear the skylarks again in the meadows.

Photo - Mike Dodd



Helena Darragh (FMP Ambassador Northamptonshire) on Countryfile

Our Ambassadors have been busy this year with the highlight (so far) being Helena Darragh, (still going through her training), doing a lovely piece on Countryfile. The piece talks about floodplain meadow restoration on the river Nene and also includes an interview with farmer John Gent who has been restoring his floodplain meadow. The link to the Countryfile episode is here, and the bit about floodplains plays from 2.32 mins to 8.31 mins. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000sm31/countryfile-nene-valley>

Rachel Remnant (FMP Ambassador Hants and Isle of Wight)-Wildflower (half) hour podcast

Rachel, one of our Ambassadors for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight) was interviewed on the show about haymaking by hand- skills she developed and refined during a trip to Romania, funded and supported by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. Her report on her experience can be read here - <https://www.wcmt.org.uk/sites/default/files/report-documents/Remnant%20R%20Report%202016%20Final.pdf> and the podcast will be available to listen to soon.

To plug or not to plug? That is the question asked at Bishop's Meadow, Farnham. Isobel Girvan - FMP Ambassador - Surrey

At the beginning of 2020 the Bishop's Meadow Trust decided adding a splash of colour along the paths that cross the meadow would provide the site with some much needed flower diversity, whilst also showcasing to the public what we are trying to achieve by enhancing biodiversity of the meadow.

We discussed the project, I put together a list of suitable plant species that included Common Bird's-foot Trefoil, Common Knapweed, Meadow Vetchling, Oxeye Daisy, Perforate St. John's-wort and Wild Carrot and the ground was prepared. The plants arrived late February and were planted out in March and April and given a trim in early June.

However, ultimately there was a failure rate of up to 70% and this was an expensive loss. There were several reasons, the main one being that we were planting into a clay based soil and last spring and summer was hot and relatively dry and the plugs could not be regularly watered. As a result they sizzled in the sun. Also our bird population uprooted several of them. We could not have predicted the weather and previous attempts with wildflower seeds have worked well in other years.



4th May after they had gone in



We do have future plans to diversify the meadows, but for this year it is once again the cattle that are our winners by creating a more species-rich sward. We have plans to put in more stockproof fencing with native hedging and increase the grazing area from 2 ha to 5 ha.

15th June wilting in the sun



15th June another area of successful wildflower seeding



Glorious Cotswold Grasslands is a project run by the Cotswold National Landscape team, tasked with creating 100 hectares of wildflower-rich grassland over three years – a target which we are delighted to have met after just two years of the project, with over 130 hectares now on the way to restoration. We have been overwhelmed with interest in the project and it has been fantastic to meet so many local landowners who care deeply for the landscape and wildlife on their land. The three-year project was originally funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and a private donor but it is look set to be extended



by at least another 3 years through a combination of self-financing and further grant funding through a partnership with Severn Trent Water.

Whilst a lot of our restoration work is focussed on the restoration of Cotswolds calcareous limestone grasslands, we have also worked on several projects involving floodplain meadows and other neutral grasslands.

In 2019 we harvested seed from the fantastic Coronation Meadow near Stow-on-the-Wold, where our botanical survey recorded a remarkable

95 species, including many species typical of the classic floodplain meadow community MG4 *Alopecurus pratensis*-*Sanguisorba officinalis*. These included devil's bit scabious *Succisa pratensis*, greater burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, meadow vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, pepper saxifrage *Silaum silaus* and southern marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza praetermissa*.

We collect wildflower seed using our vehicle-towed brush seed harvester, which can then be sown straight away onto recipient sites or cleaned and dried for autumn sowing. The seed collected from the Coronation Meadow was subsequently spread on an adjacent field plus several other local sites with similar characteristics, most also in the Windrush Valley. Several recipient sites were areas of existing grassland but where botanical diversity was low, perhaps due to historical reseeding or fertiliser application. These were scarified prior to over-seeding to improve germination rates. A couple of other sites comprised bare earth where vegetation had been cleared for various reasons and could be seeded without any further ground preparation.

We also worked with the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust at Greystones Farm in Bourton-on-the-Water to collect seed from their meadows which they then distributed on some adjacent fields, speeding up the natural regeneration process. In 2020 we didn't work on any floodplain meadows but collected seed from several neutral meadows as well as calcareous limestone grasslands and are keen to work on the restoration of further floodplain meadows in the coming season, with plans for the Windrush Valley and further afield in the Evenlode catchment and the Cotswold Water Park areas. We are also looking forward to revisiting some of our earlier restoration sites to see how they are progressing.

Away from the summer seed harvesting and restoration work, when the pandemic restrictions allow, we run fortnightly volunteer habitat management sessions throughout the autumn and winter, tackling invasive species and issues such as scrub encroachment on high quality wildflower grasslands. We have a fantastic group of volunteers who help

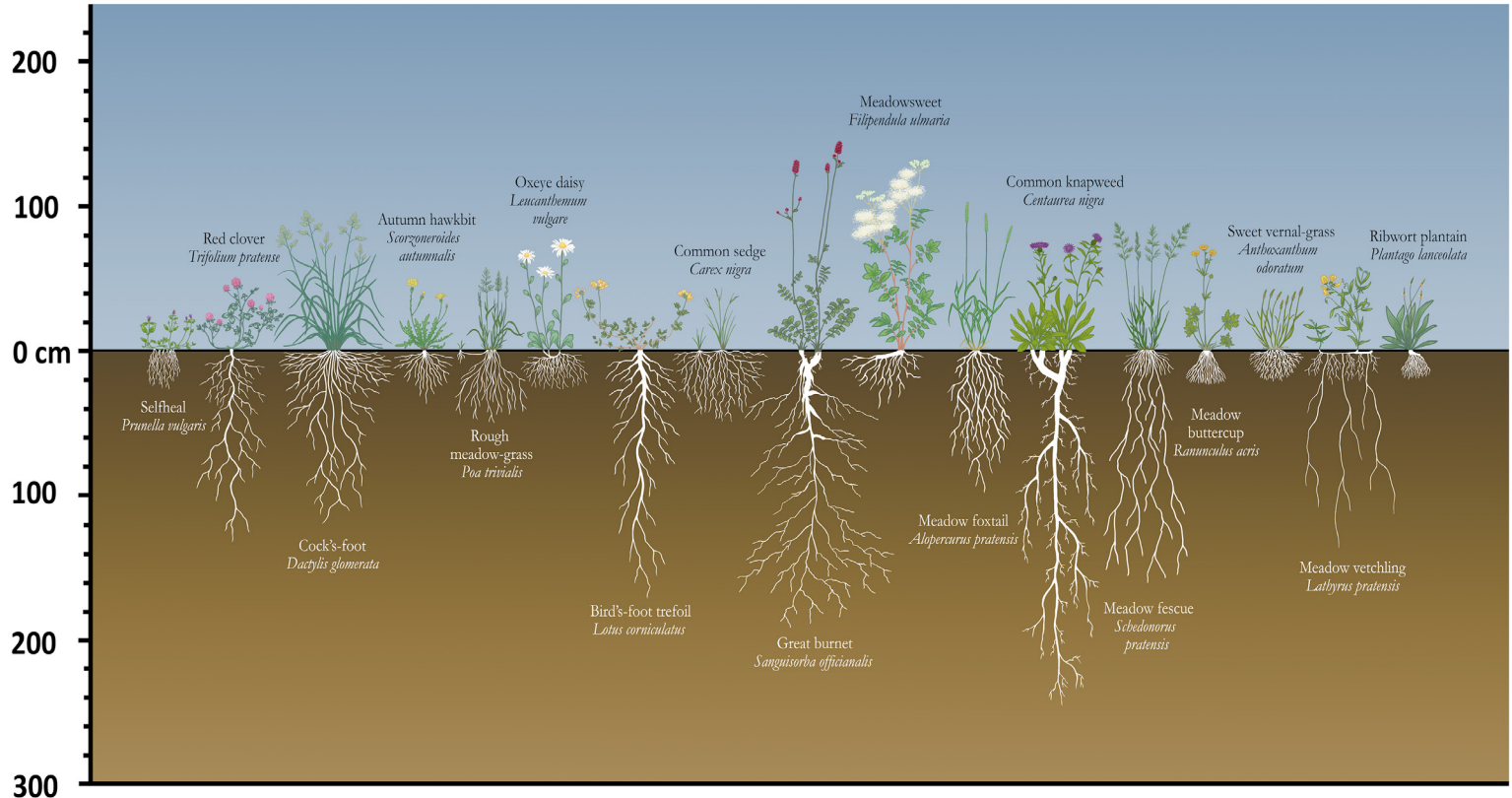


with both the habitat management work and seed harvesting in the summer and we would not have been able to achieve nearly so much without them. We are always looking for new volunteers so if you would like to find out more about what we do, please do get in touch. Unfortunately the pandemic has restricted many of other project activities, such as training workshops and summer events but we hope to be able to start offering some guided walks for small groups later this year if restrictions allow.



Shoots to roots: revealing the above and below ground structure of meadow plants

Check out our new ‘Shoots to Roots’ diagram, now available on our website, with informaton about how it has been produced and associated references.



Towards Net Zero Using Nature Based Solutions in Floodplains - A Policy Workshop

Recently we ran a workshop 'Towards Net Zero Using Nature Based Solutions in Floodplains - A Policy Workshop'. We tried to bring together organisations working on floodplains at a policy level, and Defra, to examine current floodplain status and opportunities.

The workshop was attended by 86 participants representing Government departments and agencies, NGOs, academia, farming organisations, external consultancies and organisations with an interest in river restoration. The workshop consisted of four short presentations followed by Q&A, several polls, and ended with a panel-led discussion and an opportunity to suggest policy priorities. The event was recorded and can be accessed at ???

From this, we will develop a Floodplain Declaration that all can sign up to, with a commitment to support sustainable, regenerative farming practices and develop agreed targets for species-rich habitats that will generate significant public benefits through nature-based solutions.

At the same time, there is a movement, spear-headed by The Beaver Trust to implement buffer zones along rivers. There is much synergy with this initiative and ours, although we don't have famous people to spearhead our declaration and we are working with The Beaver Trust to try and make sure we are all on the same page and sharing the same messages with Government.

We conducted polls and asked attendees to vote for their support for particular elements of a draft declaration. The tables of results are below. If you have not been involved in this, but would like to be, please get in touch with Olivia Nelson Olivia.nelson@open.ac.uk

Question	Votes	Agree %	Disagree %
1. Do you agree that floodplains should be identified as a discrete land type to facilitate the delivery of nature-based solutions, which they have the potential to provide?	53	94	6
Do you consider that floodplain management is currently sustainable?	55	7	93
Do you consider think the current policy framework to promotes sustainable land-uses on floodplains?	59	8	92

Declaration	Agree %	Disagree %	Discuss further
Species-rich habitats on floodplains provide effective nature-based solutions to multiple environmental risks	83	0	17
Species-rich habitats on floodplains should form a central part of the UK's nature recovery network.	91	9	0
Landowners, farmers and managers should be supported to restore floodplain habitats, especially meadows, via schemes specifically targeted to this landscape unit.	90	10	0
Landowners, farmers and managers should be supported by expert information, advice and guidance to restore floodplain habitats effectively.	94	0	4
250,000 ha of floodplain in the UK should be targeted for the restoration of habitat mosaics	51	2	45
70,000 ha of floodplain in the UK should be targeted for the restoration of species-rich meadow to help strip nutrients from the river systems	56	2	42
Sufficient access to restored floodplain habitats should be included to provide inspirational green space for the local communities	78	3	17

Oceanic Wet Grasslands in Scotland - update

This topic continues to be on our agenda as we progress the definition of plant communities and start to set in place mechanisms to talk to crofters despite COVID restrictions. Over the last winter, we have continued to analyse the data we collected in 2018 and 2019, and have a draft plan of community types. We outlined the first efforts of these in a previous newsletter, but have further refined them. There are several elements to this work.

1. Consultation

We ran a webinar with vegetation scientists, botanists and practitioners to get their views on our proposed communities. The recommendations that came out of that workshop are:

- To include further data from Scotland.
- Combine the data collated above with the dataset we used for the original work on the Calthion, published in 2017, to see if there are overlaps.
- Compare this data with data from particularly Ireland, where plant communities have been defined that look similar.
- Longer term we would like to work with relevant specialists to compare our findings to a European-wide dataset (European Vegetation Archive) so we can see how our data sit in a European context.

2. Crofter interviews

We are working with Dr Ann Bruce from the University of Edinburgh to interview crofters of sites where we have identified the plant communities of interest. This will help us understand more about the management history, current management practises and crofter aspirations.

3. Share the findings

Publish the findings widely in both academic and practitioner facing journals and magazines, particularly focussing on the areas in Scotland that are of interest. Use our findings to see where evidence can be provided to help in the development of agri-environment scheme options.

Photo: Hilary Wallace





FMP team updates

FMP Steering Group changes

Goodbye and thank you to Richard Jefferson AKA Species-Rich(ard), Natural England Senior Grassland Specialist, who retired at the end of March. Richard has been the NE representative on our Partnership since its inception in 2007 and his support and advice have been invaluable. Thank you Richard for all your help.

In tandem with that of course, we now say hello and welcome to his replacement from Natural England on our group - Katey Stephen, who is a National Grassland Specialist at Natural England having worked previously in the Herefordshire and Worcestershire area on protected sites with particular interest in floodplain meadows.

Katey has been involved with the FMP for many years and has spent many freezing springs counting snake's-head fritillaries on the Lugg Meadows outside Hereford. She now looks forward to being able to contribute to FMP in a national (and hopefully warmer!) context.



Richard Jefferson
Photo: Stuart Smith



Katey Stephens

Laura George takes up Post-Doc in our team

I have recently completed my PhD at the Open University, looking at the relationship between fluctuating hydrology and plant species richness at English floodplain meadows and Irish turloughs (temporary lakes). I have now begun a post-doctoral position within the Floodplain Meadows Partnership team, and will be working on a wide range of exciting projects.

For instance, I'll be working on publications which look at the: (1) amount of carbon being stored in meadow soils, (2) management of meadows for biodiversity, and (3) lessons we can learn from the long-term monitoring at Cricklade North Meadow NNR, Wiltshire.

I am so pleased to be part of this team again, and am looking forward to exploring the diverse and fascinating projects which have been undertaken by the FMP over the years. It is vital that we disseminate as much information as possible to aid the conservation of our floodplain meadows.



Laura George

