

NEWSLETTER

Summer 2014

In this issue - a trip around some Russian floodplain meadows, Coronation floodplain meadows, two opportunities coming up in the next year - one for career development and a second for funding for small scale restoration projects (page 4), and would you like to join the UK Grasslands Forum? All this and more.....read on!

A floodplain meadow in Kaluga Region, Russia, weighing in at 1000 ha, and a 45 year botanical dataset to boot!

Mike Dodd



In June 2014, some of the FMP Steering group spent a week in two areas of Russia, building contacts with Russian conservation staff and academics interested in botany and meadows. These contacts were developed through Irina Tatarenko, one of the FMP staff members who herself is a Russian botanist. She has become increasingly concerned about the state of Russian meadows, as to her knowledge some seemed to be suffering abandonment. She was also aware of a very long botanical dataset from one meadow stretching back 45 years, which would be of interest to the wider botanical and research community. It seemed appropriate therefore that we build some links and share our own experiences with our Russian colleagues and learn what they had been finding on meadows.

She successfully made contacts with two regions where visits might be appropriate and duly made arrangements to take us all there! This is no mean feat, as Russia is a BIG country and in a short time (6 days) it was hard to fit much in other than travel...however, we gave it a go with I think some very



Dr Inna Mikhailovna Ermakova in Zalidovskie Luga Meadow Kaluga Region.

Mike Dodd



a million voices for nature





David Gowing looks at a bed of hay, created as part of the sculpture trail in the Ugra National Park, Kaluga Region.

interesting outcomes.

Russia is of course not part of the EU, and therefore their process for conservation and site designation does not follow the standard guidelines we are used to. Certainly from the sites we visited, it seems that their priorities for conservation have been sites that are wild and natural, and based on a red data book of rare species. Systems dependent on agriculture and without rare species have largely been ignored as priorities, even if they are very diverse species rich sites.

Kaluga Region (200 km south west of Moscow) was our first area, and we were shown a meadow that is 1000 ha in area called Zalidovskie Luga Meadow....almost as much as the entire UK resource in one site!! This was the site of an academic dataset 45 years old. Since 1965 these data have been collected annually by Dr Inna Mikhailovna Ermakova (pictured above) and colleagues.

Inna Mikhailovna lives on the other side of the river, and got rowed over to the meadow every year to collect the survey data. She can no longer do this sadly as there is no longer anyone in her village who has a boat or time, as people move from a traditional village life to the towns and cities. Amazingly, the hay was transported in the same way; over

the River Ugra but when the river is frozen in the autumn and winter. Hay was therefore left following the cut as a hay stack until the river was frozen and it could be transported to the village.

Zalidovskie Luga Meadow, part of the Ugra National Park (<http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF&msa=0&msid=200108490083218676680.0004fdc2ca32f43f1ea3e>) contained many of the familiar species; great burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, meadow foxtail, *Alopecurus pratensis* etc, and also some unfamiliar ones (e.g. moon carrot *Seseli libanotis* was prominent!)...we also heard corncrake and saw Montague's harrier, both exciting spots, so it was clearly a very rich site from a wildlife perspective. More than 150 species of birds and 180 species of higher plants have been recorded on the meadow including the yellow-breasted bunting, *Emberiza aureola*, one of the rarest birds associated with floodplain meadows; in 2013 the IUCN recognized the species as endangered.

Vegetation data have been published in numerous papers by Ermakova and Sugorkina, and a book is now under preparation but it's only available in Russian. If Irina gets some time, she may be able to translate some of the relevant parts for us. We will encourage them to add these data to relevant European databases. The longevity alone makes the data of great value! We offered to buy Inna Mikhailovna a boat so she can continue to collect the data (but there is no one to operate it for her) and



Species rich meadow in Kirov Region with some species we are familiar with such as oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare* and some we are not; (pictured is *Dianthus superba*)

to help with her publication costs (she may take us up on this offer).

In Kirov Region, 900 km north-east from Moscow we were shown some species rich meadows on the floodplain of Vyatka River that the academics we met had not visited before. They had not previously considered these sites to be of interest, but in preparation for our visit had looked around for some meadows to show us and decided that they were indeed worthy of a closer look. The wooded meadow near Arkul village is a site of specific scientific and conservation interest as a rare and unusual floodplain habitat where plant diversity is enhanced by a mixture of vegetation types.

In both regions, our hosts had organised seminars to share UK-Russian conservation information and to talk about floodplain meadows in each region and the UK. Russian conservation seems well progressed in many areas, and functional, but funds and staff are very limited, there is little interest in land management amongst the population generally, and it seems likely that if things continue the way they are, with farming largely abandoned following the collapse in the Soviet collective farms, meadows will be at least temporarily lost to scrub encroachment and re-forestation. In our entire visit, where we crossed 100's km of endless grassland, we saw no cattle (in recent history, agriculture in this area was based around cattle) and only 2 small flocks of sheep.

It is likely that the Russians are at a point with meadows that the UK passed about 50 years ago. Meadows were not considered of interest because they were commonplace and unexceptional. We missed that boat and most of our meadows disappeared by the time we realised what was happening. There may still be time to save some of the Russian ones however. The meadows we saw (although a very small snapshot) were still OK....raising their profile now may be very timely in terms of prioritising them for conservation!

The extensive Zalidovskie Luga Meadow, at 1000 ha represents almost the entire resource found in the UK, in just one site. It is possible therefore, that Russia as a whole contains a globally important repository for this habitat.

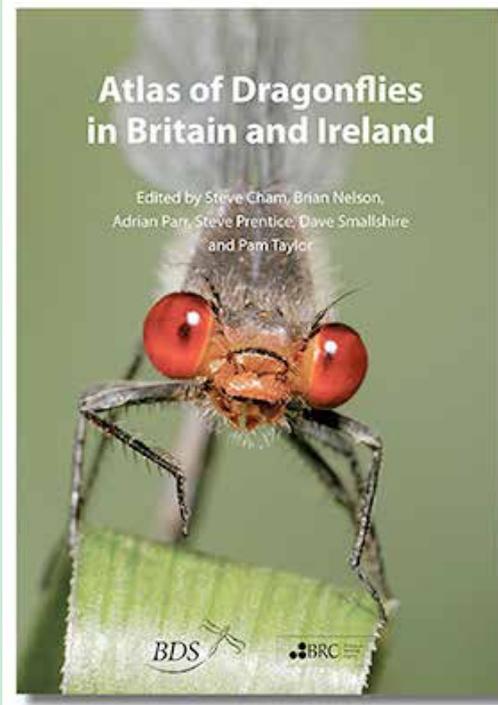
An Atlas of Dragonflies in Britain and Ireland

If you want to check out the distribution of dragonflies found on your site – this beautiful new book from the Field Studies Council will help you do just that. Written by an impressive array of nationally respected dragonfly experts; Steve Cham, Brian Nelson, Steve Prentice, Dave Smallshire & Pam Taylor, it shows just what can be done with volunteer records and scientific analyses.

Produced in partnership with the Biological Records Centre, British Dragonfly Society and DragonflyIreland, this full colour hardback book (approx. 400 pages) represents five years work by volunteers and partner organisations to map the distribution of damselflies and dragonflies throughout Britain and Ireland.

As well as summarising the distribution of over 1 million dragonfly records, the Atlas includes: Species accounts, including maps, for all 56 resident and immigrant species recorded in Britain and Ireland. Four pages devoted to each resident species. Sections on habitats, conservation, distribution changes and phenology. High quality colour photographs of all species and their habitats.

See <http://www.field-studies-council.org/publications/pubs/atlas-of-dragonflies-in-britain-and-ireland.aspx> At £32 for full accounts in an A4 hardback format for all British dragonflies – it is a must for your office or home bookshelves!!



We are putting together a bid, do you want to be involved?

Do you have a restoration project that needs a small input of something? If so read on...we may be able to help. Do you have a project that has stalled, requires some monitoring or needs a little bit of start up funding or technical advice to get going? If there are a few people who could benefit from this type of input we will put together a small bid to a funder who may be interested in this type of thing. Get in touch.....emma.rothero@open.ac.uk

Career and skill development opportunities in floodplain meadow hydro-ecology

Do you want to develop your technical skills and CV? Want to understand how to interpret what your plants, soil and water levels are telling you more quickly. We are planning to run a training programme over the next three years to develop floodplain meadow specialists in botanical survey and site interpretation. We will be offering a robust, high quality training course run over two consecutive years. At this stage we are keen to gauge interest, so if you think this would be of interest to you, please let me know. The final programme, dates and duration have not yet been decided, but the first course will run in early summer 2015 with a follow up session for those attendees in 2016. 2016 will also see a second 'first stage' course, with the follow up session in 2017. This training will be offered free, but you will be asked to commit to the long term (over 2 years) involvement to gain maximum benefit. This is a real opportunity, will look great on the CV and be designed to be of maximum use to those who manage and give advice on floodplain meadows.

We won an award!!

For engaging research at the Open University!! (<http://www.open.ac.uk/research/main/news/ou-announces-winners-its-first-engaging-research-awards-scheme>) Sadly our project did not meet the criteria to be shortlisted in the UK-wide finals.

Our second conference

If you were not able to make it, the presentations are available on the website <http://www.floodplainmeadows.org.uk/content/events> as are posters, conference programme and a new brochure 'A revision of the *Alopecurus pratensis-Sanguisorba officinalis* grassland community of the NVC'. We will be planning a third conference in 3 years' time, but in the meantime, if you own or manage a floodplain meadow and would like information or a chat, please do get in touch. We are keen to hear from anyone managing or restoring a floodplain meadow.

Fritillaries in 2014...a good news story.

It seems that after the devastating fritillary numbers recorded at many UK sites in 2013, they have bounced back remarkably well in 2014. From the North Meadow count this year, the total number of fritillaries on the monitoring quadrats reached 1272 (as opposed to 5 in the previous year after a count of 1800 in 2012). However, only 10% of the population was flowering after the stressful floods in 2013 and about 20% of these flowers were aborted (not properly developed). A significant number of vegetative plants had only one leaf with some single leaves reaching a surprising length of 20 cm and larger than average width. Such wide leaves belong to adult plants and may serve a "feeding" function providing more energy for the new bulbs. Multi-leaved (3-8 leaves) vegetative individuals were much shorter than usual. Other sites such as Portholme, experienced a similar decline and recovery.

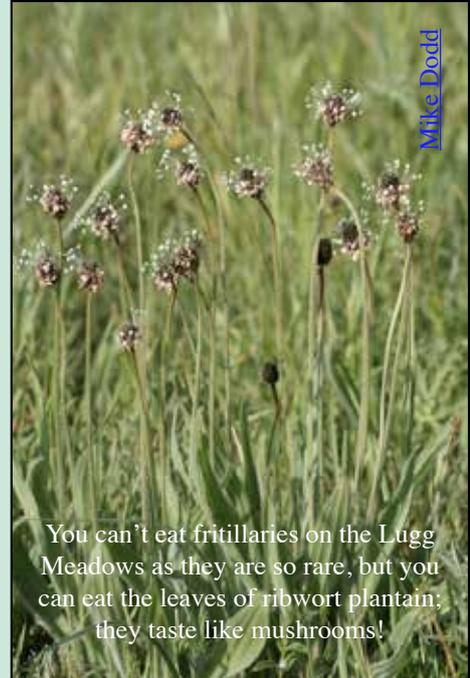
The WildPlay fritillary walk 2014

Hayley Herridge, Nature Play Ranger Officer, Herefordshire Nature Trust

To mark this year's beautiful display of snakes head fritillary flowers, the WildPlay project based at Herefordshire Nature Trust invited local families down onto the Lugg meadows for a guided fritillary walk. This took place on the same day as the annual 'Flight of the Fritillary' counting day creating an ideal opportunity to discuss not only the conservation value of these rare flowers but the importance of the floodplain meadow and traditional Lammas land management.

To make the walk as interesting, interactive and as fun as possible we included lots of practical activities such as our very own grassland classification survey and fritillary transect survey. This soon turned into a spot of foraging after one child asked whether we could eat the fritillaries! As they are so rare we decided it best not to, opting to try the flowers of ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, which taste just like mushrooms. We then went on to hunt for dole stones, look at bumblebees, play a pollination game, make alder bees and finally press some flowers.

We had some positive feedback from the day, many commenting that there was something for all the family to learn. There is so much history and natural history to the Lugg meadows that we were spoilt for what to do, leaving plenty for next time.



You can't eat fritillaries on the Lugg Meadows as they are so rare, but you can eat the leaves of ribwort plantain; they taste like mushrooms!

UK Grasslands Forum Workshop on 'Grasslands of Urban, Peri-urban and Restored Landscapes', Liverpool, 4-5 June 2014.

The UK Grasslands Forum is a network open to all organisations concerned about the future of grasslands with wildlife, cultural and community value, in order to make their sustainability more effective. It also embraces those whose primary interest is grassland productivity, and it keeps a weather eye on the wider

European grassland scene. It came into being in 2011 with the withdrawal of financial support from Defra for the Priority Habitat networks and it organises workshops of one to two days in which opinion, experience and best practice in grassland conservation and management can be shared.

Previous workshops have focused on 'Grasslands Values' at Llandeilo in mid-Wales and on 'Landscape-scale Grassland Initiatives' co-organised with the Nature Improvement Areas and located in North Devon.

In early June, hosted by Landlife at the National Wildflower Centre in Liverpool, 30 people gathered to share their experience on 'Grasslands of Urban, Peri-urban and Restored Landscapes'. Two half-days of talks were mixed with excursions to grasslands established by Landlife working with local communities among urban housing, in parks, on road verges and, with the Mersey Forest project, on restored colliery spoil.





The next meeting of the UKGF, open to all, will be this coming autumn, a one-day workshop to discuss the implications of the new agri-environment proposals. All will be welcome though, as at other meetings, attendance must be self-funded as the UKGF has no financial support. To register an interest in future meetings email johnrodwell@tiscali.co.uk.

The images (courtesy Richard Scott of Landlife) show UKGF participants discussing grassland restoration at Alvanley in Cheshire and the Landlife grassland project outside Anfield FC ground.

Conserving Historic Water Meadows

The distinctive ridges and channels of traditional floated water meadows were once important features of the landscape in many parts of England, particularly in Wessex. They fell out of favour from the late 19th century onwards, when new developments such as the availability of artificial fertiliser and cheap imported lamb and grain meant that the benefits they provided for the agrarian economy were no longer needed. Since then large numbers of redundant water meadows have been lost, many within living memory, due to processes such as drainage, ploughing and, more recently,



retail development. Old water meadows that survive as derelict systems are frequently overgrown and their channels have silted up. In this state, they can support a high degree of biodiversity, with their archaeological remains - dry ridges, wet channels and crumbling structures - providing a mosaic of different habitats. For this reason old water meadows are frequently adopted as nature reserves and wildlife conservation or habitat creation, particularly for target species, is seen as a priority in their management regimes. Where conservation-led work is taking place on traditional water meadows English Heritage (EH) aims to encourage an holistic approach, to ensure that any archaeological remains that survive will also receive the consideration they deserve. To this end, EH has produced a concise illustrated booklet providing information on the rich variety of interesting historical structures that can be found on traditional water meadows and tips on the best ways to ensure that they are preserved.

Case-studies demonstrating how the interests of both wildlife and the historic environment can be balanced effectively are also included. The booklet, entitled *Conserving Historic Water Meadows* will soon be available via a link on the FPMP website.

Coronation Meadows

The Coronation Meadows Project was launched last year to mark the 60th anniversary of the Queen's Coronation. It was the inspiration of HRH The Prince of Wales and brought together Plantlife, The Wildlife Trusts and The Rare Breeds Survival Trust.

There are two aims; the first to identify a flagship meadow in each county of the UK and then secondly to use these Coronation Meadows as a source of seed for the creation of new 'receptor' meadows in the same area.

The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT) were awarded a total grant of £990340 to deliver the restoration stage of this initiative to be delivered over 3 years. The funding has paid for 2 restoration project officers, one based in Cumbria hosted by CWT and one in the south at Plantlife office in Wiltshire. They will work with Wildlife Trusts, Councils and other organisations across the British Isles in conjunction with local landowners and managers to restore or create 300 hectares of flower-rich meadows in 60 counties.

In addition to the on ground practical work there will also be a programme of volunteer training, survey and work parties. The project will also provide training and advice to land managers along with a national Coronation Meadows event that will bring together all those involved with the initiative to share best practice and celebrate what will surely be a great success.

Over 100 Coronation Meadows have now been designated across the UK: all outstanding examples of flower rich grasslands, reflecting the character of the landscape, unique to each county. Work on the creation of new meadows at receptor sites is underway.

On 19th July this year, David Gowing was invited to speak at a conference organised by Plantlife, RBST and the Wildlife Trusts entitled "Reversing the trend." The aim was to develop a strategy for promoting grassland restoration and it also celebrated the first anniversary of the Coronation Meadow project. The event at Wiston House in Sussex brought together people involved in meadow management and restoration; HRH the Prince of Wales gave a keynote address and it was an excellent opportunity to network with a wide range of people interested in recreating species-rich grasslands. The first outcomes from this conference can be read here through the Plantlife website. http://www.plantlife.org.uk/uploads/documents/REVERSING_THE_TREND_Master_Document.pdf

Some of these coronation meadows are floodplain meadows so this is a good opportunity to highlight floodplain meadow restoration projects being delivered as part of this initiative.



Matt Johnson

Harvesting seed (above) and separating seed (below) from Boddington Meadow

Coronation Meadows in..... Northamptonshire

In Northamptonshire, the Coronation Meadow is Boddington Meadow, near Banbury <http://coronationmeadows.org.uk/meadow/boddington-meadow-upper-boddington>. Matt Johnson from BCN Wildlife Trust said:

‘Coronations Meadows’ is a chance to show off and celebrate



Matt Johnson

our best meadows as well as providing a meaningful contribution to meadow conservation across the UK. In Northants it's an exciting opportunity to restore a former floodplain meadow on the banks of the river Nene using native seed collected locally from one of our best meadow reserves. It will also be an interesting case study in floodplain meadow restoration and is part of a range of meadow creation and



Drying seed collected from Boddington Meadow on Heathers dads farm (Heather Ball works for BCN Wildlife Trust)

Heather Ball

restoration projects across the county.’

Wildflower seed will be collected from Boddington Meadow, a Wildlife Trust reserve. Never ploughed, this wet meadow on the edge of a reservoir provides an impressive display of colour including great burnet, betony and devils bit scabious. The restoration site, Kingsthorpe North Meadow is managed by the local community. The upper slopes have been restored to a semi-species rich

Kingsthorpe North Meadow; receptor site in Northamptonshire



Matt Johnson

Loughborough Big Meadow: Coronation Meadow in Leicestershire



Chris Hill

grassland though management, while the lower compartment in the floodplain will now be restored to a floodplain meadow. Using a seed harvester they collected seed this July and August, which will be dried, spread and rolled into harrowed areas at Kingsthorpe North Meadow and monitored through the rest of the project.

.....in Leicestershire

The Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust owns nearly two thirds of the Loughborough Big Meadow SSSI; the designated Coronation Meadow for Leicestershire <http://coronationmeadows.org.uk/meadow/loughborough-big-meadow-loughborough>. They hope to spread green hay from Loughborough Big Meadow on a nearby plot.

Seaton Meadow; owned by Plantlife in Rutland, being used to provide green hay for adjacent restoration fields.



Jane Smart

.....in Rutland

Seaton Meadow, owned by Plantlife, is the Coronation Meadow for Rutland <http://coronationmeadows.org.uk/meadow/seaton-meadows-corby>. Plantlife are one of the partners in the Coronation Meadows project and HRH the Prince of Wales is also Plantlife's patron. Plantlife have been busy collecting green hay from Seaton Meadows this summer which has been spread over neighbouring grassland on the same floodplain, with the aim of creating an additional six hectares of meadow habitat.

.....Elsewhere

Other floodplain meadows included in the Coronation Meadow project include Clattinger Farm (Wilts) which is also the donor site for the wildflower meadows at HRH Prince Charles' home, Highgrove House. See <http://coronationmeadows.org.uk/meadow/clattinger-farm-oaksey>. Owston Meadows (Yorkshire-South) <http://coronationmeadows.org.uk/meadow/owston-meadows-nr-doncaster1>, Chimney Meadows (Oxfordshire) <http://coronationmeadows.org.uk/meadow/chimney-meadows-bampton>, Upper River Ray (Buckinghamshire) <http://coronationmeadows.org.uk/meadow/upper-river-ray-meadows>, Old Pulford Brook Meadows (Wrexham) <http://coronationmeadows.org.uk/meadow/old-pulford-brook-meadows-rossett>, and Fancott Meadows (Beds) <http://coronationmeadows.org.uk/meadow/fancott-meadows-toddington>