B-LINES FACT SHEET 1

Grasslands for Insect Pollinators and other wildlife

Hay meadow in Wensleydale © Robert Goodison

Wildflower-rich grasslands are essential for many pollinating insects. They also provide food and shelter for other wildlife, including birds and mammals.

Pollinator food - Many bees, flies, moths, butterflies, wasps and beetles depend on a rich diet of pollen and nectar, but as individual insect species can only use certain types of wildflowers for feeding, a wide range of plants are needed.

Pollinating insects also need a continuous source of food throughout the spring, summer and autumn; a range of wildflower species will help by producing flowers over a long period of time.

Nesting and shelter for pollinators - Open ground, for example found on banks, path and track edges are used by some bees and wasps to burrow in and create their nests. Other insects require tussocky vegetation for shelter and some insect larvae develop in the seed heads of grasses and flowers. Many insects require different vegetation types and structure at different times in their life-cycles, so a mix of habitats, such as hedgerows, field margins and ditches is needed in addition to wildflower-rich grasslands.

For further information see Insect needs

The loss of wildflower-rich grasslands

Over the last couple of decades conservation organisations, landowners and farmers have been carrying out essential work to conserve and restore our important wildlife sites and species. However, over the previous 50-60 years three million hectares of wildflower-rich grassland were lost (about 97%) and so far less than 1% has been re-created. This loss has resulted in the decline of many pollinating insects, including bumblebees, moths, butterflies and hoverflies. Another issue is that many wildflower-rich grasslands are restricted to small fragments in the landscape, with no suitable habitat for pollinators and other wildlife on the land between.

© Peter Harvey

Much more needs to be done to replace this lost habitat.

Different grassland types

Hay Meadows and Pastures are managed for the production of hay, and for cattle and sheep grazing. Agriculturally unimproved meadows and pastures can produce very attractive displays of flowers during summer months which can be very important for insect pollinators; particularly as a pollen/nectar source.

Calcareous grasslands are found on shallow lime-rich soils both on the chalk downland, and upland limestone areas. Generally managed as pasture, they can be very rich in wildflowers and insects.

© Roger Key

Acidic Grasslands occur on nutrient-poor, sandy or other free draining ‘acidic’ soils often in mosaics with heathland vegetation.

For further details of grassland types see Habitats for Invertebrates

What needs to be done?

The remaining wildflower-rich grasslands need to be protected, damaged grasslands must be restored and new grasslands need to be created. This work also needs to start connecting the surviving grasslands together, to give invertebrates and other wildlife an opportunity to move around the countryside.

The newly restored/created grasslands then need to be carefully managed to provide a range of flowers and nesting areas for insects and other wildlife.

How as a landowner can I help?

Protecting existing wildflower-rich grasslands is the highest priority, as these areas will already be rich in insects and plants.

Many wildflower-rich grasslands which have been abandoned, or had heavy grazing, fertiliser and/or herbicide, may also be suitable for restoring. Restoration may be simpler and more cost effective than starting from scratch (for further information on restoration, creation, seeding and management, see list of Fact Sheets, right).

How can wildflower-rich grasslands benefit your farm?

- Increasing populations of pollinators and improving yields of insect pollinated crops
- Providing habitat for a range of natural 'pest' predators
- Resource protection (e.g. soil conservation, reducing run-off)
- Diversifying income (including agri-environment payments)

Yellow rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) © Dave Riseborough

The B-Lines Initiative

Buglife is promoting the restoration and creation of large areas of wildflower-rich grasslands through its B-Lines Initiative (see B-Lines).

This ambitious project aims to secure the restoration, creation and management of at least 150,000 ha of wildflower-rich habitat, which will help sustain bees, pollinators and other biodiversity, and enable them to adapt to climate change. B-Lines are wide strips of meadows, pastures and other wildflower-rich habitats which will join up to create a network of habitat across the country.

If you would like to find out more about the B-Lines Initiative and/or get involved, please contact "mailto:info@buglife.org.uk" info@buglife.org.uk.

This is one of a series of B-Lines Fact Sheets which provides guidance as to how to restore, recreate and manage wildflower meadows and pastures. Other fact sheets include:

- Sheet 2 - **Wildflower-rich grassland restoration**
- Sheet 3 - **Wildflower-rich grassland creation**
- Sheet 4 - **Management of wildflower-rich grasslands for pollinators and other insects**
- Sheet 5 - **Seeding the B-Lines; selecting species and seeds**

Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
The Lindens, 86 Lincoln Road, Peterborough, PE1 2SN
Telephone: 01733 201210 Email: info@buglife.org.uk

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