
GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT POLICY

Species-rich ancient meadows that the older amongst us remember in our youth, buzzing with bees and swarming with butterflies, are virtually a thing of the past in modern Britain. Buried under urbanisation and intensive farming, we have lost 98% of our agriculturally unimproved grasslands in the last half century or so. We think this is a tragedy and, although we cannot quickly create such habitats, we can do something to help by managing the grassland on our sites in ways that promote the finer grasses and herbs, and thus all the animals that depend on them. This means letting the sward flower and set seed before it is cut, avoiding herbicides and pesticides and putting up with a little untidiness now and then.

A culture has arisen in Britain whereby any long, uncut grassland is viewed by many with concern – “Best get out the mower out quickly!” We receive more questions about grassland not being cut than about any other topic. That is a shame and we hope we can persuade those who ask why we do not cut the grass as often as they would like, that we are not mad, lazy or cutting costs. It is not cheaper and sometimes costs more because of the greater time taken, need for more accurate avoidance of very species-rich areas and the greater standing crop biomass when we do mow.



It is also worth looking at the grasses as they grow and mature. They are wildflowers, too, but less colourful than insect-pollinated plants because they are pollinated by the wind. They are very beautiful, though, and extremely important in the ecology of healthy grassland ecosystems.

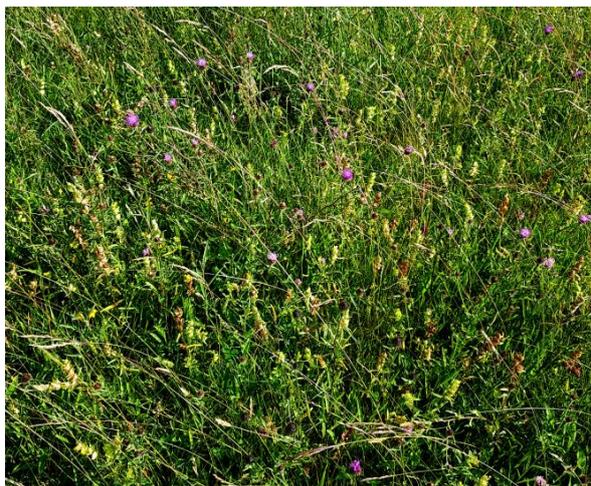
RE-WILDING AND NO NET LOSS

Re-wilding and abiding by the “No Net Loss but rather Biodiversity Net Gain” rules of the National Planning Policy Framework, and the Convention on Biodiversity to which Britain is legally committed, are the best practice policies with which we comply. At a time of Biodiversity Crisis and Climate Change, we are strict about this. It means that, as a general

rule, many areas of grassland on our sites will be cut only late in the summer or early autumn after the flowers have faded and the seed has set and been shed. During the winter/early spring we may make another cut to keep things tidy before the main growing season. After each cut, we will remove the hay, though we may leave some small patches completely uncut for a few years for the benefit of the wildlife associated with tussocky grass.

We may reduce the vigour of coarser grasses by introducing the pretty hemi-parasitic plants, such as yellow-rattle (*Rhinanthus minor* agg.), eyebrights (*Euphrasia* spp.) and red bartsia (*Odontites verna*), and we will remove IAS (invasive alien species), but generally we will not otherwise intervene.

This regime encourages species-richness and a CO₂-capturing botanically diverse meadow will be the result, though it does take a few years to establish. It also meets the Government's pollinator and related biodiversity policies.



Some grassland will not be cut at all, or only very occasionally to stop ecological succession to scrub. Some think this is untidy, but that is subjective – there is much beauty in long grass – and it is not a biodiversity argument. The reason is that long, uncut and ungrazed grassland is significantly better for invertebrates overall than any form of frequently managed sward.

SHORTER GRASS

The above is not to say that areas of shorter grass for play, picnics and along paths and road edges are entirely proscribed. We will cut such areas more regularly, usually four or five times in the growing season, to keep the grass in a “parkland” state, mimicking a lightly grazed pasture so the sward height does not reach much above 15–20cm.

We collect grass cuttings to reduce soil fertility, discourage bulky coarse plants that smother the finer species and to enhance species-richness. Primarily, we use on-site composting/ecological decomposer areas that enhance biodiversity. Sometimes we may take grass cuttings to suitable “green recycling” waste facilities. When arisings of larger bulk have to be dealt with, if possible, we prefer to make discrete compost or habitat piles in out-of-the-way corners on our land, or sometimes small amounts can be used as a mulch around shrubs.

GRASS AREAS ALONG HEDGEROWS AND AT TREE BASES

Please note that it is important for the optimal condition of hedge base flora that grass not be cut too short of frequently close to hedges. We therefore leave a gap of a metre or so between shorter cut areas and the hedge base. These areas will be treated as for meadow grass. Areas at the base of trees will also not be cut. This helps protect the trunks from accidental damage and preserves the important tree base microhabitat which is where many arboreal invertebrates shelter and pupate.

If you would like to know more about biodiversity and why it is so essential that we maintain our open green spaces for wildlife, please see our article *Biodiversity Protection and Promotion in our Public Open Spaces* and *The Wonders of Greenspace* on the web site or email us if you would like a free copy.



IMPORTANT - WET GROUND

Please note that several of our sites have some or all ground that is “heavy”, *i.e.* compacted or on clay or marl and is not free draining. In such cases, we may not be able to mow or carry out other groundworks operations satisfactorily after spells of wet weather. To avoid making the ground conditions worse or creating an unsightly result, we will usually delay operations until conditions improve. This also applies generally to adverse weather conditions. We have not forgotten you! Thank-you for your understanding.

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Cowslips in a spring meadow

Professional service
Sustainable land management
Better planning results
Enhanced biodiversity

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