

Good News for Fairchild's Wildflower Meadow

Contributed by Jez Reeve

Inventory plots: 5m x 5m plot survey in Fairchild's Meadow

Date: 17 July 2016 10:30–12:30am

Conditions: Bright, warm and sunny

Square: TL 4695/7685

Domin scale: Ranges from 1 = 1% cover to 10 = 100% cover

Surveyors: Chris Prescott, Chris Ray, Jez Reeve, Ann Sherwood

Square 1 at northeast (lower part of field) Domin scores in numbers

Species	2016	2015	2014	2013
Common Knapweed	9	8	4	2
Yellow Rattle	5	4	4	1
Meadow Buttercup	4	3	5	1
White Clover	0	3	2	
Ragged Robin	0	0	1	1
Red Clover	4	4	3	3
Oxeye Daisy	1	1	2	1
Self-heal	0	0	2	1
Common Mouse Ear	0	0	1	1
Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil	3	4	3	1
Creeping Thistle	1	1	1	1
Lady's Bedstraw	1	3	0	1
Yarrow	0	1	0	
Meadow Vetchling	1			1
Species	2016	2015	2014	2013
Ribwort Plantain	1			1
Yorkshire Fog	4		7	
Meadow Foxtail	3		5	
Sweet Vernal Grass	2		3	
Meadow Barley	1		3	
False Oak Grass	1			
Rough Meadow Grass	3		4	
Red Fescue	3		6	
Cocksfoot	3			
Crested Dogtail	1		1	
Sorrel	1		1	1
Creeping Bent Grass			6	
Common Catstail			1	
Rye Grass – perennial			3	

Square 2 at southwest (upper part of field) Domin scores in numbers, where recorded

Flowers and herbs	2016 upper	2016 lower
Common Knapweed	4	9
Yellow Rattle	2	5
Meadow Buttercup	3	4
White Clover		0
Ragged Robin		0

Red Clover		4
Oxeye Daisy		1
Self-heal		0
Common Mouse Ear		0
Greater Bird's-foot Trefoil		3
Creeping Thistle		1
Lady's Bedstraw		1
Yarrow		0
Meadow Vetchling	6	1
Grasses	2016 upper	2016 lower
Ribwort Plantain		1
Yorkshire Fog	8	4
Meadow Foxtail	2	3
Sweet Vernal Grass		2
Meadow Barley	2	1
False Oak Grass	4	1
Rough Meadow Grass		3
Red Fescue	2	3
Cocksfoot		3
Crested Dogtail		1
Sorrel	1	1
Creeping Bent Grass	1	
Rye Grass	1	
Yellow Oak Grass	1	
Lesser Catstail	1	

This year the Fairchild's Meadow wildflower count was greatly assisted by having an expert botanist to help with the identification, which speeded up the counting. It also enabled us to do (x2) two 5-metre square counts. We did one at the bottom of the wildflower meadow and one up on the north-facing slope. They produced slightly different results, as you would expect, due to the variations in soil and location, coupled with the very local competition amongst the plants themselves. In the lower square increased amounts of Common Knapweed and Yellow Rattle were recorded, whilst in the upper square there was much more Meadow Vetchling and a similar variety of grasses. Many walkers had commented on the magnificent display of Meadow Buttercup that immediately preceded the count. But what does this all mean?

Since 2005, when the decision to try to create a wildflower meadow was taken, all the management and planting in this field have concentrated on improving the environment for wildflowers and wildlife. In 2013 Natural England wrote a note to explain the importance of unimproved neutral grassland, including hay meadows, known under the National Vegetation Classification (NVC) system as MG5 grassland. They reported that this type of meadow, which had been commonplace in the 1960s, was now rare with less than 6,000 hectares remaining. Creation of lowland meadows, including MG5, is an objective of the England Biodiversity Strategy (Biodiversity 2020). The characteristics of MG5 grassland are listed as a series of wildflower/herbs and grasses:

Characteristic herbs include:

- Common Knapweed, Oxeye Daisy, Bird's-foot Trefoil, Lady's Bedstraw, Common Sorrel, Yellow Meadow Vetchling, Meadow Buttercup, Ribwort Plantain, Cowslip, Common Cat's-ear

Characteristic grasses include:

- Crested Dog's-tail, Quaking Grass, Sweet Vernal Grass, Yellow Oat-grass, Red Fescue, Common Bent

All of the species listed as characteristic of MG5, except the Quaking Grass, have been recorded in Fairchild's Meadows over the last four years, some species on the increase, like the Knapweed, Yellow Rattle, and Red Clover. Obviously weather conditions play a huge part in the variation of the count each year – the Ragged Robin comes out earlier in the season, for instance. The news is good for Fairchild's Wildflower Meadow. Based on the results so far it certainly looks like we have a successful management

regime. Next year we hope to engage the use of the MAVIS (Modular Analysis of Vegetation Information System) computer program in order to have our results verified.