

Identifying Cumbria's wildflowers

This guide is intended to help you identify and enjoy the special plants of hay meadows in Cumbria. It provides a short cut to using a flower identification book. When using this guide to help you identify the plants in your hay meadows, do be aware that the flowering times of the species shown in this leaflet will differ according to the altitude and aspect of the meadows. In general upland sites will be later to warm up in spring and all species will be later to flower and set seed. For example, what's in flower in Grange-Over-Sands won't be out for at least a month in Ravenstonedale or six weeks on the north side of Skiddaw.

The start of the season can also vary hugely as a late spring can delay plants getting away for up to a month, and if the fields are shut up late after lambing it will take a while for the plants to grow and flower. We have a shorter growing season than much of the UK and most species are in flower for only three or four weeks at one locality.

The appearance of a meadow will change through the season as different species come into flower.

Earlier species include wood anemones and pignut- any sign of these is often harder to find later on in the season. Early summer brings lady's mantles, marsh marigold, wood crane's- bill, bistort, yellow rattle, red clover and eyebrights, while in mid-summer you can see melancholy thistle, hawkbits and selfheal. The last flowers to come are black knapweed, great burnet, meadowsweet and betony.

These species are all illustrated and described in this field guide.

The heritage of hay meadows

Hay meadows are a vital living part of our rural and cultural heritage. Flower-rich meadows, once a familiar site in the countryside, are becoming rarer and rarer. Over 97% have been lost since the second world war.

The flowers and grasses found in today's hay meadow habitat can be dated back to the woodland glades and floodplains of Ancient Britain. As people started to settle they cleared the trees and began farming these new open grassland areas.

By the 11th century hay meadows had become part of a traditional way of life. The Domesday Book records hay meadows in 8 out of 10 settlements. As such a meadow can be a communities' living link to the history and culture of that settlement, often being older than any surrounding structure or building.

The traditional farming and management practices used to create and manage these man made habitats are a valuable part of our rural history. They represent the vestiges of a farming system and way of life that is rapidly being lost.

Hay meadows can however still be found in Cumbria. They may be the meadows furthest from the stading, on thinner soils over limestone, or where the farmer may just prefer to manage his land traditionally. Meadow Life project is seeking to help enhance and restore Cumbria's upland hay meadow landscape.

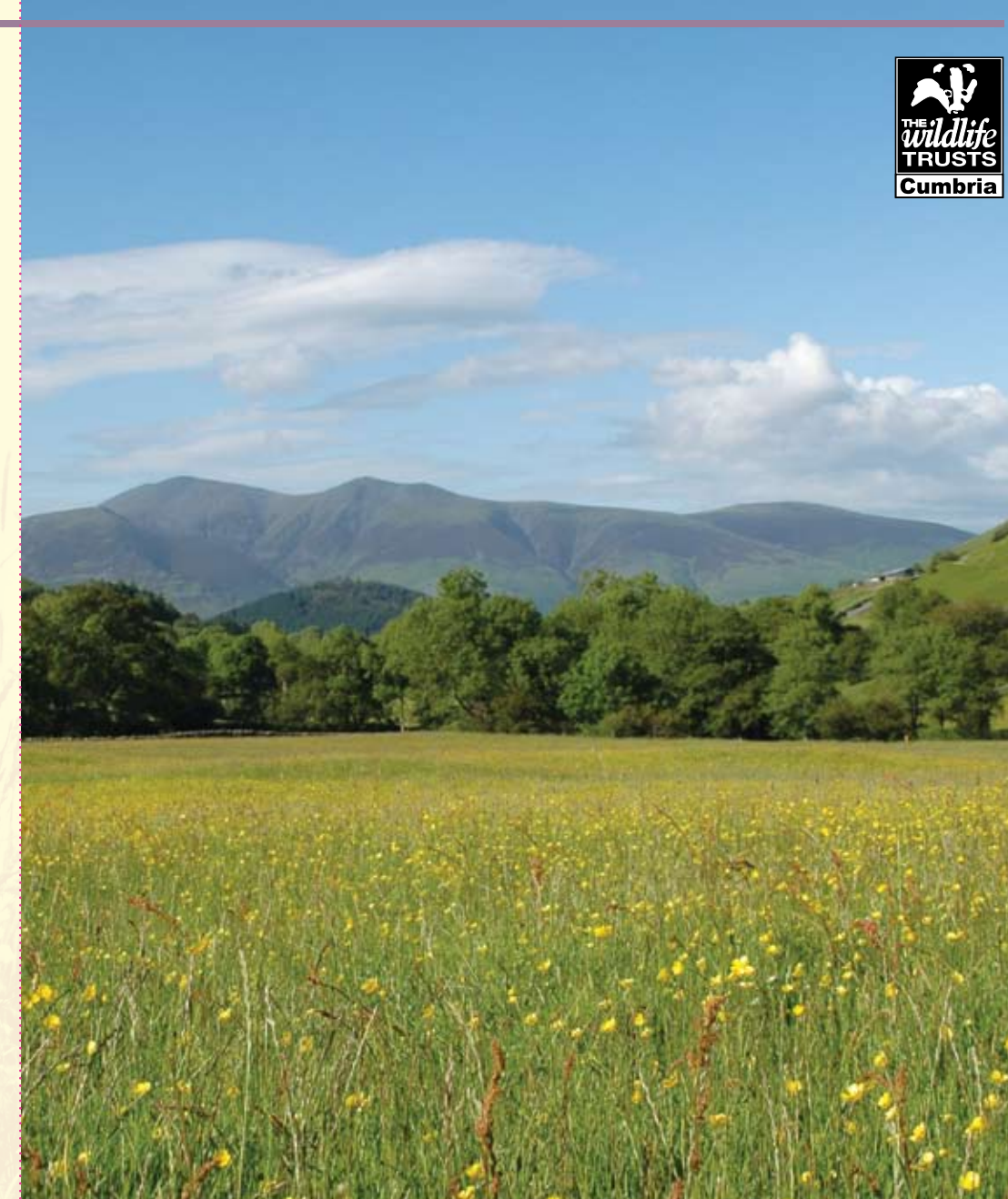


Meadow Life

Cumbria's hay meadow project



www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk



Identifying hay meadow flowers



Protecting **Wildlife** for the Future

Cumbria's hay meadow project

Meadow Life

For further information, please contact the Meadow Life project at:

Cumbria Wildlife Trust, Plumgarths, Crook Road, Kendal LA8 8LX
T 01539 816300
mail@cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk www.cumbriawildlifetrust.org.uk

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A Cumbria Local Nature Partnership project delivered by Cumbria Wildlife Trust

Very early flowering



◀ **Wood anemone**
Anemone nemorosa
A small spring flowering plant with palmate leaves and a delicate white blushed-pink flower.
Height: 5-30cm

Marsh-marigold ▶

Caltha palustris
A robust low-growing perennial with shiny heart-shaped leaves. Yellow buttercup-like flowers 1-5cm across, borne at the end of the stems. Found in wetter areas of hay meadows.
Height: 30cm



Pignut ▶

Conopodium majus
A small, delicate plant with filigree dark-green leaves and umbels of small white flowers, growing from a small, round tuber.
Height: 40cm



Early flowering

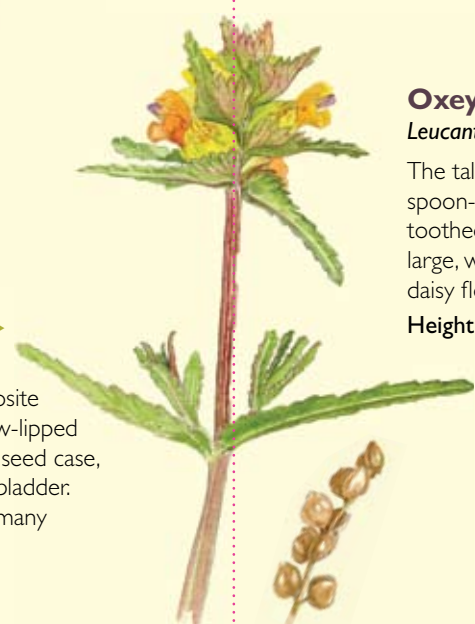
▶ **Meadow vetchling**
Lathyrus pratensis
A climbing perennial with grey-green leaflets in pairs and yellow sweet-pea-like flowers.
Height: 1.2m



▶ **Red clover**
Trifolium pratense
A tufted perennial with typical hairy clover-type leaves and deep pinkish-purple flowers. A common plant in hay meadows.
Height: 60cm

Yellow-rattle ▶

Rhinanthus minor
An annual with opposite toothed leaves. Yellow-lipped flowers mature to a seed case, inflating to a papery bladder. A hemi-parasite on many grass species.
Height: 50cm



Globeflower ▶

Trollius europaeus
A large member of the buttercup family with shiny palmate leaves and large pale yellow globose flower heads. Found on steep flushed slopes within hay meadows.
Height: 70cm



Oxeye daisy ▶

Leucanthemum vulgare
The tall stems have spoon-shaped pale-green toothed leaves with large, white-petalled daisy flowers.
Height: 75cm



Greater bird's-foot-trefoil ▶

Lotus pedunculatus
Erect and ascending stems. The yellow flowers are in clusters, 10-18mm across. Found in damper meadows.
Height: 1m



Selfheal ▶

Prunella vulgaris
The hairy, square stems bear oval leaves. The purple flowers form a short spike.
Height: 30cm



Wood crane's-bill ▶

Geranium sylvaticum
A perennial with lobed leaves and purplish-pink flowers with white bases. The seed pods have longbeaked seeds resembling a bird bill.
Height: 70cm



Lady's-mantle ▶

Alchemilla species
The plants have shallowly lobed palmate leaves and frothy heads of small star-shaped light-green flowers. There are three species common to Cumbria: *A. glabra*, *A. filicaulis* ssp. *vestita* and *A. xanthochlora*.
Height: 20-80cm



Mid-season flowering



Rough hawkbit ▶▶

Leontodon hispidus
Hairy stems arise from a rosette of toothed leaves. The small yellow 'dandelion' flowers often have a red underside to the petals.
Height: 60cm



◀ Eyebright

Euphrasia officinalis agg.
An annual with toothed leaves. Petals are white to purple, usually with darker veins and a yellow blotch on the lower lip.
Height: 35cm

Water avens ▶

Geum rivale
Upright stems bear hanging flowers of pale apricot with dark-red veins. The seed head has long, red hairs.
Height: 50cm



Late flowering

Melancholy thistle ▶

Cirsium heterophyllum
Stems bear large purple thistle flowers. The large leaves have felted undersides that form a wide rosette.
Height: 1.2m



◀ Common knapweed

Centaurea nigra
A clump-forming plant with rough leaves with thistle-like reddish-purple flowers.
Height: 1m



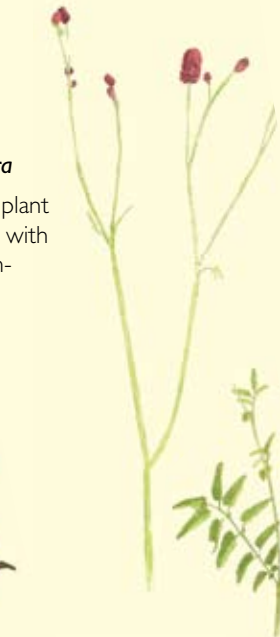
Meadowsweet ▶

Filipendula ulmaria
A tall plant with red stems, toothed basal leaves and a frothy head of small sweet-smelling tiny flowers. Found in damper hay meadows and on edges of fields.
Height: 1.2m



◀ Great burnet

Sanguisorba officinalis
A tall plant with finely toothed leaves. The flowers form a dense dark red oblong spike at the end of the flowering stem. Found in late cut hay meadows.
Height: 1.2m



◀ Betony

Stachys officinalis
Consists of leafy rosettes and two to four pairs of stem leaves. The reddish purple flowers are 12-18mm across. Found on drier slopes and banks within hay meadows on acid or alkaline soils.
Height: 75cm

