

Grasslands Volunteer's Newsletter

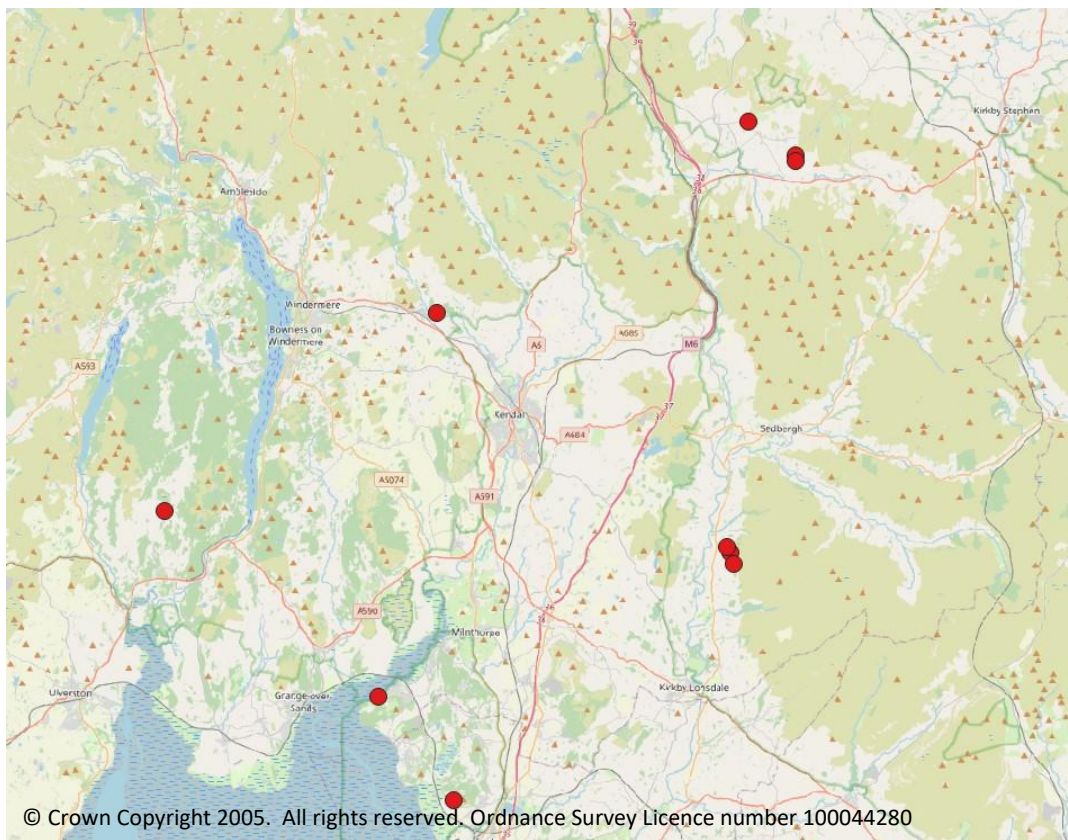
Hello everyone,

Autumn is here, one of my favourite seasons with all the autumnal colours and my preferred hiking conditions. It's now that time of year where grasslands is wrapping up their practical activities, ready to hibernate for the winter.

For those of you that weren't able to attend the Grassland Volunteer Thank You Event on the 10th of October, I wanted to share some exciting opportunities that will be coming up next year but firstly, I am just going to summarize this season for those that missed our talk.

Existing surveyors:

Across this 2024 survey season, you all completed a total of 10 monitoring surveys on behalf of Cumbria Wildlife Trust amounting to approximately 20 days of work. What a fantastic achievement, here is a map that shows the spread of the sites surveyed this season:



Across the winter, after all my report writing, I will find time to digitise the results and share them with the landowners for their record, along with any further information or recommendations on future management. Me and Charlotte will then combine our data and submit it to Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre.

Existing surveyors, new surveyors and anyone thinking about surveying:

As we continue to restore grasslands across Cumbria, our survey site list grows longer and longer. We are attempting to recruit new grassland surveyors. I have had some volunteers express interest in surveying for grasslands already, some who are already experienced botanists and some who are still complete beginners.

New Surveyors- I understand many of you have hesitations about surveying due to inexperience and/ or lack of confidence in botanical skills. In hopes of helping build your confidence, I will schedule another

group survey day for next summer which I will send details for early next year. I have also put together an excel spreadsheet for you to assign your name to. If you are happy to survey in 2025 and are happy to do this in a group, please assign your name to one of the groups on the spreadsheet: [Survey pairs or groups 2025.xlsx](#)

Experienced surveyors- I understand that many of you may not want a beginner slowing your surveys down, so I thought I best ask for any volunteers. Would any of the experienced surveyors or survey pairs mind supporting our new surveyors in their learning phase?

If so, please would you assign your name to one of the survey groups in the excel spreadsheet: [Survey pairs or groups 2025.xlsx](#)

Grassland Projects:

Grasslands have several projects on the go at the moment but there are two specifically that I wanted to talk about with you surveyors. Me and Claire have been working on different projects with our amazing QGIS whizz, Christine:

- **Cumbria Connect-** this is a project Shannon and Christine have been working on. This formed the basis of Shannon's QGIS and data training. The project summary written by Lee Schofield: *'Reconnecting Cumbria seeks to realise a vision of 33,000ha of self-sustaining, species-rich Cumbrian landscape, comprising diverse and connected habitats in which wildlife, ecosystem services and livelihoods are interdependent. By actively restoring directly-managed land and catalysing wider agricultural land-management change through a collaborative working model that acknowledges and respects differing values, both real and perceived, we will achieve positive, long-term outcomes for local livelihoods and nature. This will serve as a blueprint for a wider restoration goal of a 100,000ha+ arc to Wild Ennerdale, and a template relevant to upland landscapes across England and beyond.'*

This project involves working with lots of different partner organisations.

I am currently undergoing the scoping phase of this project. This has involved scouting out potential sites/ meadows, surveying these sites and collecting soil samples. I am now at the stage of processing the survey results, report writing and assessing which sites look suitable for restoration. I will follow up with the landowners to discuss restoration suggestions and begin planning restoration works if they are keen to proceed.

- **Cumbria Seed Bank Project-** Our project will focus on the following grassland types found in the southern Lake District: Calaminarian, Lowland dry acid, Upland and northern hay meadow, Upland acid and rush pasture, Upland calcareous, Lowland meadow and pasture We will target our work on the network of County Wildlife Sites (CWS) across the area. These are sites known to be of importance for wildlife but have no statutory protection. The project will have a particular focus on some rare plant species which were once common in Cumbria but are now in serious decline in the county. These were an integral part of the county's cultural and natural heritage, and all listed in the Cumbria Local Nature Recovery Strategy as priority species. Our proposed list is: Bistort, Globeflower, Lady's mantle, Spignel, Marsh marigold, Wood cranesbill, Melancholy thistle, Wood bitter cress, Devil's-bit scabious, Saw-wort, Grey green sedges, Betony, Great burnet and Dyer's greenweed.
- **North Pennines-** Claire has surveyed 41 sites for this project this summer. This project directly provides action for North Pennines grasslands. It specifically aims to support farmers with applications for agri-environment schemes that target species rich grasslands. The project will help to provide farmers with the knowledge to:

- Use appropriate levels of grazing and/or cutting to maintain or enhance biodiversity – traditional breeds can be a valuable tool in this management
- Use very little or no fertiliser on species-rich grassland
- Avoid the loss of any species-rich grassland to ploughing, reseeded or fertilisation
- Ensure there is no drainage of species-rich wet grassland
- Take every opportunity to enhance/restore species-rich, or potentially species-rich, grasslands
- Control rabbits where essential

The monitoring surveys our volunteers have collected for us are extremely useful for our ongoing work, for finding suitable sites to return to, for example, we trawled through all our monitoring surveys when assessing suitable sites for our Cumbria Seed Bank project, as I have just mentioned. Over the years, Claire has used your surveys to support her CWT projects. For example- we have previously restored a site at Haybridge Nature reserve, using the monitoring survey results collected over the past few years, we realized it was suitable for brush harvesting. We returned this summer to that meadow to collect brush harvested seed which we spread on a nearby site undergoing restoration this year.

Plug planters

A huge achievement this season with over 30,000 plugs planted across 25 fields at 11 sites. With the help of:

- Cumbria Wildlife Trust Volunteers
- Kendal Conservation volunteers
- The National Trust
- The National Trust Volunteers
- Coniston Primary school
- Levens valley CE primary school

A huge thank you to everyone of you that helped me achieve this over the past planting season. We have produced a map of all the sites both the pollinator team and grassland team have restored that we have on record:

Upcoming opportunities

All details, dates and time to be confirmed in the New Year:

- Group survey day
- County Wildlife Site Surveys and training
- Various botanical training courses
- Lots of plug planting

If you have any queries in the meantime, please don't hesitate to give me an email.

Best Wishes,

Shannon Horrocks