

Protecting grasslands with grants for landowners

The Mendip Hills AONB has some of the most important stretches of species-rich grassland in the UK. In this parish, and in others along the Southern edge of the Mendip Hills, the steep, sharply draining limestone soils, and the sunny position create the perfect conditions for wildflowers and pollinating insects to thrive. Grasslands are an ancient habitat that formed after the last Ice Age, and were then sculpted and expanded by the activities of early humans like the Cheddar Man. As humans became more advanced and agricultural, shepherding and haymaking became more common in the Land of the Summer People, and are still a vital part of our landscape and cultural heritage. But many grasslands have been lost across the UK, primarily due to overgrazing or the addition of chemical fertilisers, which have pushed out the colourful wildflowers.

Farmers and landowners in this parish can help to strengthen the remaining grasslands on the Mendip Hills.

If there is already good grassland on your holding, keeping it that way with managed grazing regimes and native breeds that can still maintain bulk on rough ground, plus avoiding any chemical inputs is hugely valuable – protecting the biodiversity, protecting the carbon sequestration of the soils, and protecting the beauty of the area. If you would like to increase the species-richness of your holding, there are ways to reduce the rigour of dominant grasses to allow native wildflowers to thrive – this can include changes to grazing patterns and taking hay cuts, and may involve increasing the number of local wildflower seeds in the soil, for example through green-haying. And you don't need to convert your entire field. Field margins and banks can provide essential corridors for species to move about in the landscape. Wildflower strips will increase the number of pollinators on your land, and also increase the number of predators like birds and beetles to control pest species, without losing too much productive land.



Wildflower

s will often find a way, if given an opportunity and some time. Species rich grasslands require fewer financial investments than improved grasslands over time, there are few annual investments needed and the preservation and enhancement of our beautiful grasslands is a type of public good, for which the government is committed to paying farmers and landowners for under the upcoming environmental land management schemes.

Currently, the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme is open for applications, and would love to support projects that enhance and connect the species-rich grasslands of the Mendip Hills AONB in this parish. If you are interested in finding out if this funding programme could help you deliver projects on your holding that will enhance the beauty of the Mendip Hills, help nature recovery, or mitigate against the impacts of climate change, speak to Megan on megan@mendiphillsaonb.org.uk, call 01761 462338, or use the contact form on the Mendip Hills AONB website. Case studies of local farmers who have already delivered projects through the Farming in Protected Landscapes programme are available on the website.

