

Eycott Hill Nature Reserve: Hay meadow fact file



Cumbria
Wildlife Trust

Where is Eycott Hill Nature Reserve?

This is Eycott Hill Nature Reserve, located between Penrith and Keswick, just past the hamlet of Berrier in Cumbria. It is an upland reserve with spectacular views and incredible wildlife, and is 216 hectares in size — that's the same size as 300 football pitches!



What is a hay meadow?

Hay meadows are areas of grassland which are managed to grow a hay crop. The traditional management of meadows involves a combination of cutting and grazing at different times within the year. Hay meadows support a large number of wild flowers and are home to a wide variety of wildlife. At Eycott Hill Nature Reserve the species-rich uplands meadows are one of the products of a low-input farming system. During June and July the meadows come alive with bright colours and buzzing invertebrates.



History of the hay meadows at Eycott Hill Nature Reserve...

You can find definitions of the terms used below in the separate glossary.

In 2013 six hectares of improved grassland were identified as being nutrient enriched and fairly limited in biological value, having previously served only as pasture for livestock grazing.



2013

The North West field was restored in 2015, again using donor seed from Piper Hole. A further 3,000 plug plants were planted which consisted of supplementary species, such as great burnet, common knapweed, wood cranesbill and meadow vetchling.



Spreading green hay

2015

Quadrat on a survey day in August 2017.



2017

All the hay meadows are surveyed, during June and July each year, across four volunteer days following a 'W' transect. Each quadrat along the transect is divided into nine squares and each species that occurs is given a score from 1–9, depending on how many squares it appears in. There are usually 12–20 quadrats taken for each field. In 2017 there were 51 species recorded.

The meadows turn from a sea of pink red clover in June to a swathe of yellow hawkbits and ox-eye daisies in July. Species such as great burnet, betony and melancholy thistle are present in small numbers.



2019

To prepare the hay meadows, the existing vegetation in the fields was first cut and baled for hay. The areas were then power harrowed and the donor green hay was distributed using a rear discharge muck spreader. Some areas could not be cut due to rough ground conditions and vegetation. Any remaining green hay was then broken up further and spread by hand before being rolled in.



2014



Power harrowing

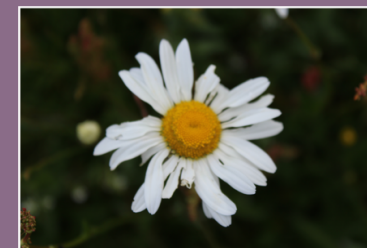
The initial trial of one hectare of hay meadow restoration work began in 2014 thanks to funding from the Biffa Award. The South West field received donor seed from Piper Hole Coronation Meadow near Kirkby Stephen. Seed was also taken from the donor site to be grown as plugs for use on the next field the following year.

2016

In 2016 the North Easterly and South Easterly fields were restored using donor seed from Moor Farm near Keswick. A further 2,500 plugs, grown from the original donor seed, were planted across all the fields. Over 2014, 2015 and 2016 approximately 2.7 kg of seed was spread, consisting of yellow rattle, common knapweed, red clover, melancholy thistle, meadow vetchling, great burnet, autumn hawkbit, rough hawkbit, oxeye daisy and betony.



Yellow rattle seeds



Oxeye daisy

2018



The meadows are cut for hay once per year between late July and August. For the initial 2–3 months following cutting, the meadows are after-grazed by roughly 40 Swaledale ewes, usually until around December.

Photography credits Colin Aldred, Imogen Rutter and Nichola Jackson.

