

The Hay Time project aims to conserve and restore species-rich hay meadows across the Yorkshire Dales and North Pennines, as well as promote a greater understanding and enjoyment of these special grasslands.



Species-rich meadow, Upper Weardale (NPAONBP)

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We can provide the information contained in this leaflet in large print, different formats and other languages on request. Please call 01388 528801 for details.



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Managing species-rich hay meadows for wildlife



Species-rich hay meadow, Swaledale (YDMT)

Why manage your meadow for wildlife?

- ✿ Species-rich hay meadows
 - support a wide variety of special plants
 - provide ideal habitat for ground-nesting birds and other wildlife
 - are now very rare
- ✿ You may qualify for higher payments under Higher Level Stewardship and other agri-environment schemes
- ✿ If your meadow is species-rich, it may be possible to sell seed for use in restoring other meadows
- ✿ Although the crop is usually lighter, species-rich hay contains a wider range of vitamins and minerals than hay from an agriculturally 'improved' meadow



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NORTH PENNINES
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



How to maintain the special nature of your meadow



Light dressing of farmyard manure (S. Ingwersen)



Heavy dressing of farmyard manure (S. Ingwersen)

What management?	Why?
Cut hay once annually in late summer (mid-late July or early August).	Cutting earlier than this can prevent many characteristic meadow plants from setting seed.
Make field-dried hay rather than silage.	Turning and drying the hay over 3-5 days allows more seeds to be shed.
Aftermath graze with cattle or sheep during autumn and spring.	Cattle and sheep keep the sward low and help to disturb the ground with their hooves, creating spaces for new seeds to germinate.
Graze enough to achieve a sward height of about 3 cm through autumn and spring.	The seeds of several species need to be frosted before they germinate. A low sward allows this to happen and provides light for new seedlings to emerge. Grazing lower than this can damage new growth and create too much bare ground.
Roll and chain harrow where necessary by mid-March.	After mid-March nests of ground-nesting birds could be damaged. Keeping moles under control avoids the need to do so much harrowing.
'Shut up' (remove stock) in April - early May.	Removing stock allows the hay crop to grow and plants to flower and set seed.
Apply a light dressing of well-rotted farmyard manure if needed and if part of traditional management (see illustrations left).	Light dressings should be sufficient to maintain a sustainable crop. Any more than this will act like chemical fertiliser. In fresh manure, most of the nitrogen gets washed away very quickly, but well-rotted manure acts as a slow-release fertiliser. It also spreads more evenly as it is not as lumpy.
Do not apply chemical fertiliser.	Applying fertiliser (especially N) favours a few fast growing species at the expense of traditional meadow species.
Occasionally apply lime if the soil pH drops below 5.5.	Some traditional meadow species may disappear if the pH drops too low, as they cannot tolerate the more acidic conditions.
Do not install new drains.	Some meadows support special damp-loving plants such as globeflower, which could disappear if the field were drained.
Where old field drains exist, maintain them if there are signs of rush encroachment.	Rushes can provide valuable habitat for birds in pastures, but they are less important in a hay meadow.