



THIS ISSUE

Helping Track England's
Biodiversity

PAGE 02

Plot portrait
Volunteer: Susie McNaughton

PAGES 03-05

Support and guidance

PAGE 06

Flower anatomy: Back to basics

PAGES 07-09

Species Spotlight – **Thrift**
(*Armeria maritima*)

PAGE 10



Sue Nottingham

Scheme News

PAGES 11-13

Botany through Art

PAGES 14-15

Field diaries: Your photos

PAGES 16-18

Get Involved

PAGE 19

Further opportunities and
thanks

PAGES 20-22

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

RACHEL MURPHY

Welcome to the 2026 NPMS Summer newsletter!

We hope volunteers and supporters are managing to keep as cool and comfortable as possible through these severe heat wave and drought conditions. Once again records have been broken, with summer temperatures reaching new heights.

Dr Oli Pescott, UKCEH, writes: "2026 will perhaps prove a memorable year for many of us due to its intense summer heat. As our climate continues to change along the lines predicted by climate scientists, our efforts to document the small-scale, but accumulating, changes happening in our most valued habitats become ever more important and fascinating. Whether it is a new insight into the composition of our plots, such as deeper-rooted species steadfastly displaying their true abundances whilst grasses and other plants turn brown, or the ongoing year-to-year shifts in the hierarchy of different plants vying for space and dominance, we will return home tired, but with a new understanding of how ecological changes really occur."

Thank you as always from the NPMS Team, for your time and efforts this season. It's not too late to complete your late summer survey if you haven't already. But don't forget, your safety comes first, and you can find suggestions and tips relating to wildfire risk on p. 11.

You can find further scheme news, volunteer stories and development opportunities can throughout this bumper newsletter edition. We've loved collating all your contributions. From Susie's beautifully encouraging plot portrait (p.3), to newly released resources, data uses and inspiring group efforts in Northern Ireland (p.13). Thank you for sharing your passion and your creativity.

We have thoroughly enjoyed meeting and training so many new and existing volunteers already this year, with yet still more sessions to come (p. 6). We are also excited to extend our thanks via the Learning Through Volunteering offer, with other environmental conservation organisations (p.19).

As ever, do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any queries, feedback or stories: support@npms.org.uk



How NPMS data are helping track England's biodiversity

NPMS data contribute to England's species abundance indicator

Francesca Mancini, UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (UKCEH)

Thousands of records collected by National Plant Monitoring Scheme (NPMS) volunteers are now helping to track progress towards national biodiversity targets in England. In the latest release of Defra's Indicators of Species Abundance in England, NPMS data were used to estimate abundance trends for vascular plant species, contributing directly to the government's assessment of how wildlife is changing over time.



Rachel Murphy

The all-species abundance indicator brings together data from 1,185 species across a range of taxonomic groups (including birds, mammals, butterflies, moths, fish, freshwater invertebrates and vascular plants) to measure long-term changes in biodiversity.



New modelling work done by the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and the NPMS has enabled the inclusion of several species of plants in the all-species and priority species indicators. The updated analysis now includes 218 vascular plant species, providing much broader representation of England's flora than was previously possible.



The overall picture from the latest assessment shows that England's monitored species have declined substantially over recent decades. Across all species included in the indicator, average abundance has fallen by around 40% since 1970, while priority species, those considered of greatest conservation concern, have declined by around 80%.



The results for vascular plants are more encouraging, with the overall average trend for the 218 plant species included in the analysis showing little evidence of a substantial change since 2015. Looking more closely at the species-level results reveals that, although 38% of species increased in this time period, 40% showed no significant change and 22% declined.



Jo Mullholland

The inclusion of NPMS data demonstrates the enormous value of volunteer-collected monitoring data. Every survey by NPMS volunteers contributes to a better understanding of how plant populations are responding to

environmental change and helps inform evidence-based conservation and policy decisions. Without the commitment of NPMS participants, this contribution to national biodiversity reporting would not be possible.

“The results described here build on the work of many people. In particular, we would like to acknowledge Dr Oli Pescott (UKCEH), who developed the vascular plant species trends used in the analysis, and Dr Fiona Burns and Simone Mordue (RSPB), who produced the Indicators of Species Abundance in England.”



Francesca Mancini is an Ecological Modeller at the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH), where she develops methods for for measuring biodiversity change at national scales. Her research supports the development of biodiversity indicators used to assess

the state of nature and track progress towards national and international environmental commitments. She works closely with different stakeholders in biodiversity monitoring to strengthen the evidence base for conservation, helping to ensure that biodiversity indicators are scientifically robust, transparent and useful for policy.



Plot Portrait

My NPMS Volunteer journey: Susie McNaughton, Perthshire



My NPMS Plot is my happy place. I step into timelessness as soon as I am absorbed into surveying the four quadrats set up in my kilometre square. The wide skies and undulating horizons of Glenshee on the edge of the Cairngorms are magic. The detailed observational world brought close through the hand lens is stunning. The silence in the air is broken rarely by a bird or sheep, or a fast-moving car on the road - my favourite is ravens croning their messages for all life to hear.

I first visited the allocated NPMS square in April 2025, doing a recce before returning over the following fortnight to complete the survey. The landowner was facilitative. He was already used to people visiting this small parcel of land as it has been home to archaeological digs and is crossed by the Catheran trail, a fantastic walking route.

Setting up and completing the first survey was a 'two steps forward and one step backwards' experience. I was delighted to come across the NPMS scheme and joined with the wish to develop my plant surveying skills, contribute to the worthy overall aim of the project, and plunder the opportunity to get to know one particular spot in more detail. I am a plant-lover at heart and, while I'd worked on other types of nature surveys, I hadn't landed into botanical surveys since far-off student days.



Above: Susie, completing her first 2026 summer survey at Nymans.

The project materials and YouTube channel were comprehensive and helpful, and I certainly went back to them to get guidance, especially when enthusiastic bursts forward needed tempering with method.

The Habitat map for my square showed a variety of habitats on the theme of wet and dry heathland, crossing into bog, with native Pinewood and juniper scrub in the corner. The theme was accurate, though the Pinewood turned out to be a spruce plantation. My willingness to stomp through boggy areas and streams, and navigate uneven slopes, was the only access issue. I ended up with four plots of distinct habitat, roughly: dry heath, wet heath, boggy heath, and lowland grassland, and got to work.

Below: The many colours of Susie's heathy Plot 4.



Plot Portrait

Susie McNaughton cont.



Susie McNaughton

My beginner's enthusiasm wanted to identify all plants on every plot, and my first survey was certainly a lengthy one in which I got familiar with ling (*Calluna vulgaris* or fraoch in Scottish gaelic), bell heather (*Erica cinera*) (left), and cross-leaved heath (*Erica tetralix*), each of which I can now spot from a distance.

In my second year I am much more functional and knowledgeable on at least the Indicator species, though still have a way to go with identifying grasses. AI apps certainly helped me along the way, though I've seen them misidentify enough times to not rely on them fully. I've concentrated on improving my plant classification and identification skills over the last couple of years, to the point where I took a FISC (Field Identification Skills Certificate) in July of this year. A vegetative sample of crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) appeared in the lab test of my FISC examination – my lucky break as I had stared at its red stems many a time in one of my NPMS plots – and it's not an easy one to 'know if you don't know' and are under time pressure to work it out.



Above: Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*), Susie McNaughton

I hold my hand up to making mistakes in my first year of surveys that I have corrected in the second. For example, when I was surveying in May this year I realised that what I had assumed was all blaeberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) on my plot 1 was in fact a mix of blaeberry and cowberry (*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*): the darker colour of the cowberry leaves initially drew my attention, but then the flowers and the detail of the leaves under the hand lens showed me that there were two species not just one.



Above: Blaeberry (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), Susie McNaughton

My discernment is improving with experience. I also have to come clean with NPMS admin about an initial error (about 30 metres) in the Grid Reference for one of my plots – I'll conveniently blame lack of signal for what 3 words – while I know where the plot is, I need to make sure others know where it is too.

Discovered an error in your survey data or plot locations? Not to panic, mistakes are part of learning. You can edit survey records, by selecting the "Edit" button to the left of a listed "Visit", on your "My data" page.

Plot location errors can only be edited by NPMS staff admin, once data has been recorded. Just let us know!

Plot Portrait

Susie McNaughton cont.



My favourite botanical moments include walking through the wafting hare's-tail cottongrass (*Eriophorum vaginatum*) on my way to plot 2, and getting deeply observant of sphagnum moss and its many colours at plot 4. Plot 4 mesmerised me with its deep cushions of mosses, and I felt peatland creation was alive beneath my feet, buoyed up by my recently-acquired understanding of the dynamics of peatland degradation and restoration. I plan to measure the peat depth on my next trip to the quadrat – a new skill to practice on the list for August 2026 – and hence gain a better understanding of the habitat.



Above: Haircap moss (*Polytrichum commune*), Susie McNaughton

Below: Evidence of Susie's growing interest in the Moss on her plot.



My lunch spot is by a fire pit in the middle of a remnant prehistoric stone cairn/ roundhouse. I sit marvelling and imagining people living on the land exactly here centuries and millennia ago, when it was busier than today. The fire pit, I assume, is a remnant of a gathering spot during archaeological digs here from 2012-2017. Within a couple of hundred metres of where I sit, two early medieval turf longhouses were excavated, believed to have been in use from 600-900 AD, and lived in by people called the Picts. The Picts are remembered for their exceptionally fine artistic skills, with evidence of carved stones and metalwork that flow with graceful symbols and animals. In the quiet, I imagine children going down to collect water or play in the stream, and elders reading the signs in the sky and nature as they make decisions of how to manage the land and life.



Above: Prehistoric stone cairn, Susie McNaughton

I am planning to carry out my second 2026 survey in a few weeks time (before this Newsletter comes out). I will enjoy every moment of it, especially as in February this year I moved down south to support my elderly mother and, while I have managed to revisit Glenshee to do my NPMS surveys in 2026, I am not sure if I can sustain it in the future. Anyone want to pick it up to continue it next year? It's an easy plot to love.



Support and guidance

We have had a great and inspiring time meeting so many of you through this season's training and engagement events. We've run 19 sessions thus far since spring, with a few more to come this season. Including our small and interactive Getting Started and Data Entry support sessions. We will soon advertise our free winter mini-series. Keep an eye on our [Training and events](#), where you can find a mix of [webinars](#) and [interactive workshops](#). Also take a look through our newly updated [Online training resources](#), for NPMS specific habitats and methods guidance to enjoy at your own pace.



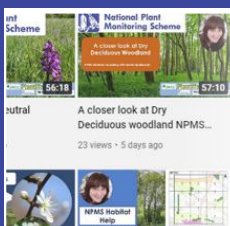
Upcoming training and events...

18 th Sept 10am-3:30pm	Intro to NPMS and survey methods In-field, Gwynedd – With Rachel Murphy and Karen Fisher
Aug-Oct	Northern Ireland Habitat training Various dates & locations – With BSBI training officers
8 th Oct 18:00	NPMS Plot creation and data entry Online workshop – With Rachel Murphy
12 th – 22 nd October	Learning through volunteering: Free online talks and workshops for nature conservation volunteers. See Pg. 16



Don't forget...

Recordings of all our training webinars and other helpful guidance videos can be found on the [NPMS YouTube channel](#)



Subscribe to our NPMS Support YouTube channel to be alerted to the latest videos



Frequently asked questions:



The species in my plot don't match those on the list for the habitat I've identified. Have I misclassified the habitat?

Classifying the habitat of your survey plot is your first task, informing which species list you will use for your survey and therefore which species you need to record if present. This is the case whether you are surveying at the Wildflower or Indicator level, with its expanded list. But remember, the indicator species lists provided in the [Species list booklet](#), are not lists of species that indicate habitat type, but rather they indicate the health of that habitat. There are both positive indicators of habitat health, as well as negative indicators, which suggest less than optimal conditions within the plot. You should not therefore be using this species list to identify the habitat of your plot, as there are likely species on the list that you may not necessarily relate to the habitat. There are of course certain species/assemblages, which are more common within certain habitats and can assist with classification. But these can be found elsewhere.

Support with habitat ID:

- Appendix 1 – NPMS [Survey Guidance notes](#)
- NPMS [Online training](#)
- [NPMS Support YouTube](#)
- **Britain's Habitats: A Guide to the Wildlife Habitats of Britain and Ireland.** *Wildguides & Princeton University Press.* Lake, S. et al. 2015
- [Habitat look up table](#)
- *And Get in Touch!*

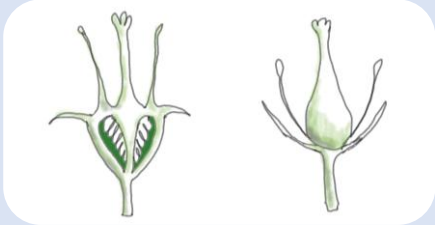


Flower Anatomy: Back to Basics

The terminology for different parts of a plant can be intimidating at first. However, looking closer and becoming familiar with the parts of a plant can provide a strong foundation for learning more about plant ID.

These terms and the functions of these parts, are incredibly useful in utilising a botanical key (coming up in our next edition), along with simply understanding and enjoying the wonder of these species, their fascinating and individual characteristics. Below we have provided a useful Glossary of plant anatomy terms and examples. We hope you feel inspired to head out, look closer and have a go at putting these terms into practice. [Images and descriptions provided by Sarah Shuttleworth, Plantlife](#)



Pedice:	The stalk of an individual flower in an inflorescence. Essentially, the stem that holds the flower.
Receptacle:	The expanded part, normally at the end/apex of the flower stalk, on which the organs of a flower are attached. This may be convex, or a concave cup. <i>Examples:</i>  
Sepal or Calyx:	Sepal - A single part of the outermost row (whorl) of floral organs, usually green. These protect the flower in bud. The sepals can be named as a group – the calyx Calyx – The outermost row (whorl) of floral organs, often divided into sepals – This is the name given to the sepals as a group, usually when the sepals are fused. For some species, these are completely absent. <i>Examples:</i> Free sepals  Partly fused  Fused sepals  
Petals:	A single, usually free, unit of the second floral row (whorl). They are coloured, leaf like parts which may secrete nectar at their bases or in special spurs. They also may have scent producing glands usually at their bases. The number of petals, as well as sepals, are of great importance in plant identification. The Petals can be named as a group – The Corolla (see next page).

Flower Anatomy: Back to Basics

Diagrams and descriptions provided by Sarah Shuttleworth, Plantlife
Continued...



Corolla:

The name given to the second set of floral organs consisting of free petals or of a joined tube and petal lobes. This term is usually used when the petals are fused to form a shape.

In wind pollinated flowers the corolla may be inconspicuous or absent.

Petal and corolla examples:



Free



Joined tube

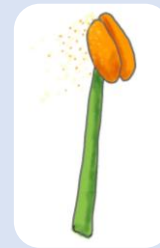


Petal lobes

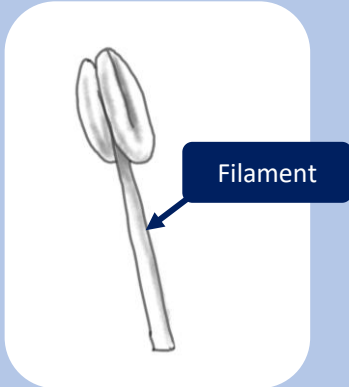
Stamen:

The male organ of a flower, consisting of a stalk (filament) with the anthers that have the pollen.

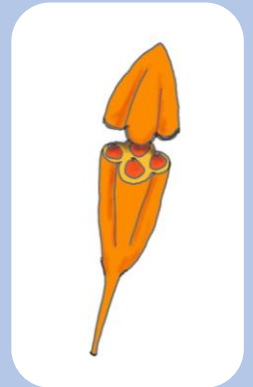
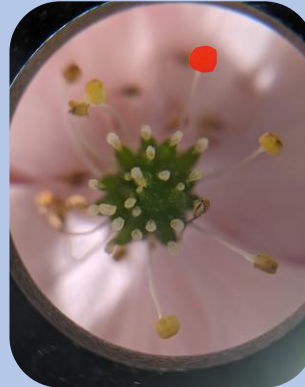
See below for filament and anthers.



Filament: A stalk that bears an anther.



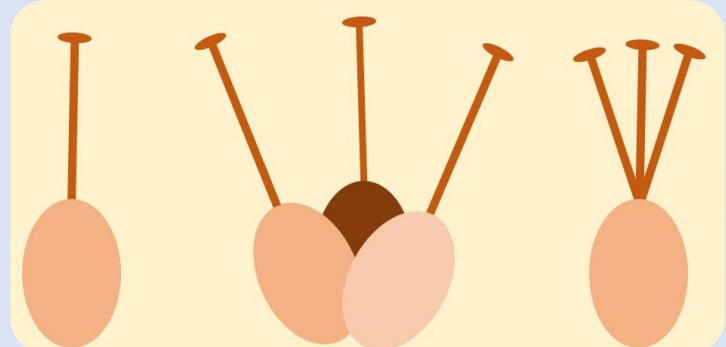
Anther: The part of the stamen containing pollen.



Pistil or Carpel:

The female reproductive organ in flowering plants, usually referring to an individual unit consisting of an ovary, a style and a stigma (see below).

One or more carpels combine to form a pistil. The number of carpels and whether or not they are fused is important for identification. When fused you can count the number of stigmas or styles or number of partitions in the ovary.



Simple, individual

Unfused, separate

Fused

Gynoecium:

The innermost whorl of a flower, and the collective term for all the female reproductive parts of the flower (ovary, style and stigma).

It is composed of one or more carpels which enclose the ovules.

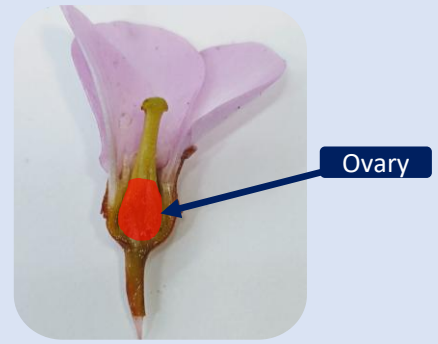
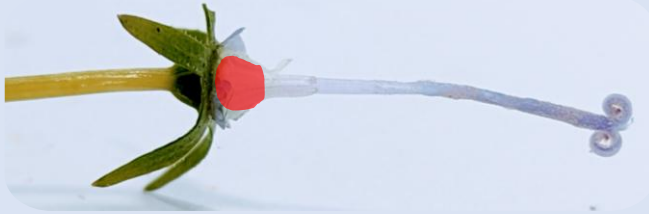
Flower Anatomy: Back to Basics

Diagrams and descriptions provided by Sarah Shuttleworth, Plantlife
Continued...



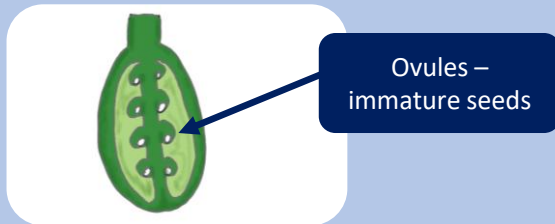
Ovary:

The ovule-bearing part of the female organs, usually an enlarged part of the pistil that contains the ovules and eventually becomes the fruit.



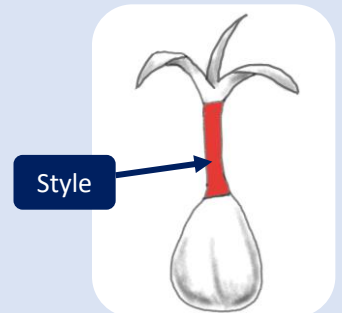
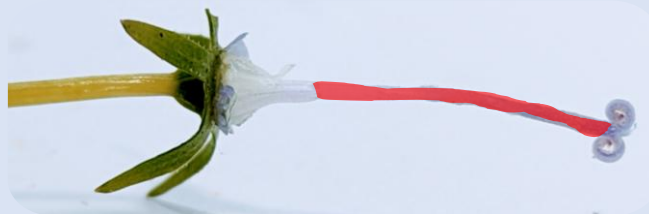
Ovule:

The immature seed in the ovary before fertilization.



Style:

The part of the female organ between the ovary and the stigma, often slender and sometimes absent when the stigma sits on the ovary directly.



Stigma:

The pollen receptor on the female organs. Might be directly on the ovary or elevated on top of a style. Can be different shapes (right).



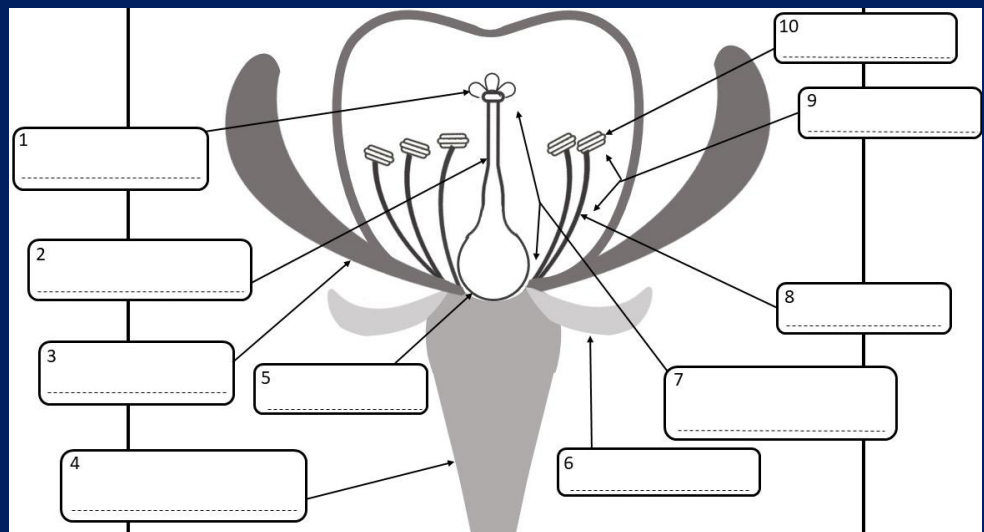
Quiz Time!

Using the Glossary above, why not test your knowledge and have a go at naming all the numbered parts in this simple flower anatomy diagram.

Answers on **page 22**.

You can download a free plant anatomy training presentation [HERE](#).

Or watch a video of the full presentation provided by Sarah Shuttleworth [HERE](#).



SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Thrift
Armeria maritima



A perennial plant with flowers on long stems above springy cushions of foliage. A familiar sight around the coast of the UK.

Identification:

- Small rounded flowerheads comprising many small pink (though infrequently white) flowers, on a long, thin stalk.
- Each flower is approx. 8mm wide, with a corolla of five petals that are joined at the base, with stamens opposite these petals and five separate styles that are hairy towards their base.
- The hairy calyx (the whorl of 'sepals'), has five ribs and teeth up to 1mm deep.
- The flower stalk is unbranched and grows to ~20cm, emerging from a rosette of narrow and numerous leaves.



▲ Image: Cath Shellswell



- The leaves of *Armeria maritima* are narrow and numerous and usually have hairs along their margins.
- The leaves grow between 2-10cm long and have a single vein. They often have hair along the margins.
- The leaves form dense cushions.
- Under the springy cushion of foliage, the rootstock is woody.

◀ Image: Ava Marley

Where and when:

A plant with compact leaves that hold moisture, it can survive in harsh conditions, and can be seen on coasts, cliffs and salt marshes as well as inland, high on mountain ledges in Britain and Ireland. The subspecies *A. maritima ssp. elongata* is found in Lincolnshire but is very rare. Thrift has seen little change in distribution since the 1960s, though it has infrequently appeared along salt-treated roads since the 1980s.

Its main flowering season is May-August but can vary between April-October.

Other common names:

Cliff rose, cliff clover, cushion pink, lady's pincushion, marsh daisy, sea gillyflower, sea grass and sea pink.

Did you know?

This tough coastal wildflower with its ability to endure harsh conditions, came to symbolise resilience, endurance, strength and as such protection for seafarers. Coastal communities traditionally viewed it as a 'guardian of sailors' and symbol of good fortune. Families believed picking sea thrift, gifting it to loved ones or carrying it offered safe passage and ensured a fisherman's return to shore.



◀ From 1937 to 1953, Thrift was used as an emblem on the British threepenny coin (*thrupenny bit*), used until the decimal system took over in the 1970s. This choice played on a dual meaning, both celebrating the resilient maritime flower while also subtly encouraging the British public to practice financial "thrift" during and after World War II.



Ava Marley



SCHEME NEWS

NPMS Data supporting air pollution research

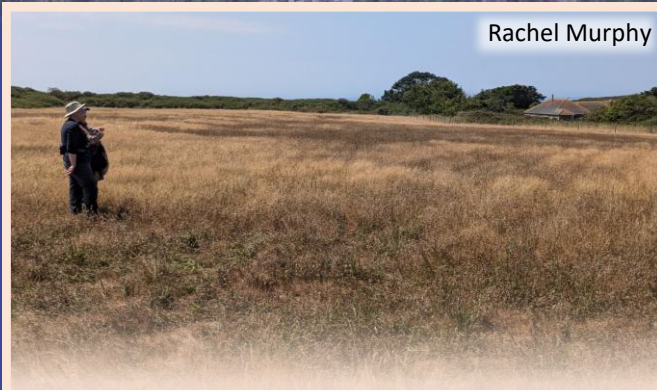
Dr Oli Pesott, UKCEH

Data collected by National Plant Monitoring Scheme volunteers are now contributing to the UK Air Pollution Impacts on Ecosystems Networks (APIENs). This national resource brings together information from atmospheric, freshwater and terrestrial monitoring programmes to show where air-pollution pressures and their effects on ecosystems are being monitored across the UK. NPMS is one of the contributing networks, with its field surveys providing valuable evidence about the habitats and plant communities present at monitoring locations.

By combining NPMS information with data from other environmental networks, APIENs will support research into how air pollution affects habitats, biodiversity, soils and fresh waters; and how ecosystems respond as pollution declines. The resource also supports the UK's statutory reporting on the ecological effects of air pollution and will help researchers and policymakers identify gaps in monitoring and undertake more integrated analyses. This is an important use of the careful observations made by NPMS volunteers and demonstrates their value beyond the Scheme's core assessment of changes in plants and habitats. More information on APIENs [Here](#).

NPMS Annual Report 2025

Earlier this season, you may have spotted the release of the **2025 NPMS Annual Report**. NPMS survey coverage, data volume and impact are increasing year on year. Discover how data is being used in this latest report, which takes a special look at the commitment and collaboration our many partners and volunteers involved in plant and habitat monitoring. It contains a range of voices exploring how the NPMS has been working to provide inclusive and valuable habitat data to all. You can download and read the report [HERE](#).



Rachel Murphy

Wildfire risk

The recent hot, dry weather has significantly raised the risk of wildfires, with some regions already affected. Wildfires can happen anywhere and spread quickly, so it's important you consider your safety when out and about.

Heading outdoors?

- **Be vigilant.** Make sure to monitor reports of wildfires in your area through the media or via your local emergency services. Do not go to sites where there are fires in the vicinity.
- **Be careful.** Many wildfires are sparked by human activity. Take steps during hot and dry weather to reduce the risk of a fire starting and spreading, i.e. Don't drop cigarettes or anything that is burning on the ground; Don't use gas stoves or kettles during dry periods; Pick up litter and dispose of glass bottles properly; Make sure that flammable substances are safely stored; and Do not park over tall, dry grass, as the heat from catalytic converters can ignite dry vegetation.
- **Have an escape plan.**
- **Consider postponing** your visit until conditions are less hazardous.

If you're worried about a wildfire near you, check updates from [Your local Fire and Rescue Service](#), local authority and the [Met Office](#).

If you see smoke/flames, and believe a wildfire is active, call 999 immediately.





SCHEME NEWS

Rooted in inclusion

Karen Fisher, Plantlife

We released a [blog post](#) in June, highlighting the NPMS' commitment to accessibility. The blog details how NPMS partners are working to remove barriers to accessibility; increase the scope of volunteer roles; provide more detailed square information including elevation, rights of way, and local transport hubs; and the opportunities for training and buddying available through the scheme.



New: Access Permissions Support Toolkit



Check out our new Access Support [Toolkit](#), for supporting navigating and orienting around your 1km square. Resources include everything from Landowner leaflet and permission letters, to FAQs and mapping tools.

CAREERS Phase 2 funding secured

Our latest Annual report summarises outcomes of the **CAREERS** (Citizen science for Advancing Racial Equity in Environmental Research Super-consortium) programme.

We are delighted that funding for **CAREERS phase 2** has been secured from the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) 'Opening up the environment' call. This will build on the outcomes of phase 1 to address systemic, organisational and cultural challenges to widening access and participation of people from ethnically minoritised groups in the environmental field. We look forward to working and learning with project partners from YCEDE- a Yorkshire Consortium for Equity in Doctoral Education and UKTePoP - A partnership of UK organisations using citizen science to monitor our environment, on this important next phase.



Sarah Veale

A Big NPMS Welcome to Dean McCullough!

Introducing a new Botanical skills officer, recently joining the BSBI N. Ireland botanical skills project team. Let's hear from Dean...



What were you doing before starting your new role?

I had worked in various eNGO roles in wildlife conservation and I completed my MSc last year from Queen's University, Belfast. I specialised in the floristic assemblages of Irish temperate rainforest. I also worked freelance as a nature educator between all of these roles, working with schools, wildlife groups and other organisations on various topics such as bog biodiversity, urban botany and pollinators.

What does your new role involve?

I work closely with colleagues Kim and Jo to deliver for the Botanical Skills Project which is all about upskilling people on plant and habitat identification. My particular focus is on intermediate to advanced botanical training. We also dedicate time to NPMS outreach and training which helps equip people with plant ID skills and data collection skills. Of course, the role involves lots of partnership work with fellow botanists, Vice-county Recorders (VCRs), ecologists and eNGOs. All good things!

What are you most looking forward to?

I am eager to see how much my own botany will have improved by the time the project ends in 2028. I have noticed a great improvement already, and I only started in February! It's always a learning day on the job through working with like-minded people from a diverse background of experiences. There is so much joy in passing on the information I learn from others!

Any upcoming plans you'd like to share?

We have so many coming up. I am excited about the sessions we are running in my home county, Co. Down. We have a montane plant recording day on Slieve Muck on the 18th August and an intro to aquatic and emergent plants at Donaghaguy Reservoir on the 19th. We also have a habitat training session at Derrymore, Co. Armagh too, which should be a rewarding day for all involved. Keep an eye on our events calendar.

SCHEME NEWS



RSPB N.Ireland's Volunteer Team of the Year - Northern Ireland Youth Network for Nature teams up with the BSBI to support the National Plant Monitoring Scheme.

The RSPB NI Youth Network for Nature is an inspiring collective of more than 200 young people aged 16 to 30 who are committed to protecting Northern Ireland's natural heritage. Since launching in January 2025, members have made a significant contribution to nature recovery across Northern Ireland.



They have supported peatland restoration projects, taken part in Swift surveys, assisted with research and monitoring at Harbour Meadows on Belfast Lough, and helped with practical conservation work for the Giving Corncrakes a Home project. They have also supported critical advocacy activities and carried out habitat management activities on reserves such as Portmore Lough and Montiaghs Moss, working alongside RSPB staff to deliver essential conservation and policy outcomes. It's not hard to see why they won RSPB's prestigious President's Award for 'Best Volunteer Team of the Year'.



In addition to their RSPB specific activities, they have developed an incredible successful partnership with the Botanical Society of Britain and Ireland (BSBI). As part of this collaboration the young people have had the opportunity to develop valuable botanical skills through a series of training sessions led by BSBI's Jo Mulholland where they have learned how to identify plants, conduct surveys and lead monitoring activities as part of the wider National Plant Monitoring Scheme (NPMS).

Their impact for nature is both visible and far-reaching. Their efforts have contributed to healthier peatlands, improved habitats for priority species, enhanced biodiversity data collection, and stronger advocacy and action to shape nature-positive policy. For BSBI, the partnership has strengthened engagement with young people across Northern Ireland while helping to build the next generation of skilled volunteers and plant surveyors. By equipping young people with the knowledge and confidence to contribute to long-term ecological monitoring, the Youth Network is helping to secure the future of vital UK-wide conservation work - demonstrating the transformative power of meaningful youth involvement.



All images provided by: RSPB N. Ireland Youth Network for Nature

Youth Network member Amy Doyle who, as part of this partnership work, has her own NPMS square and says:

"I set up a community square alongside the Cookstown Wildlife Trust (who recently celebrated 65 years as a group!). My plot stretched between Loughry College and the Mid Ulster Sports Arena. It was a warm summer's day, and we completed the survey at the Wildflower level. The plot had been previously surveyed nine years prior and there was a big gap in the data, so I wanted to contribute with my wildlife group to understand how the botany in our area is changing over time. Our survey finished off in a lovely meadow filled with orchids".



Rachel Murphy



Botany through art

We have been delighted to discover since our previous supporter newsletter, that a number of our volunteers enjoy expressing themselves and their connection with nature through poetry. What a talented group you are!

Volunteers Clare Ablett and Helen Watkinson, who join together each year to survey a remote NPMS square in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, found that this season's NPMS surveys inspired them to poetry and have been kind enough to share with us their individual perspective pieces.

Kilnsey Moor

We start off, uphill
On our biennial quest
To view the orchids, the pansies, the bedstraws
The curlews and skylarks greet us,
A hare dashes back to her young, perhaps.
But our eyes are mainly ground fixed
To spot the mountain species of limestone.
Some like old friends, a nod, a smile
Some new with a whoop or cheer,
Maybe missed, or

not noted over the years?
There's that satisfaction in recording,
No one but us, the cattle and sheep, as we ascend.
Birdseye primrose,
Eyebright, dropwort
Names we love to state again:
Yet stumble on a twayblade green and unassuming,
unseen in previous forays.
Up to the trig point, looking over to Hawkswick

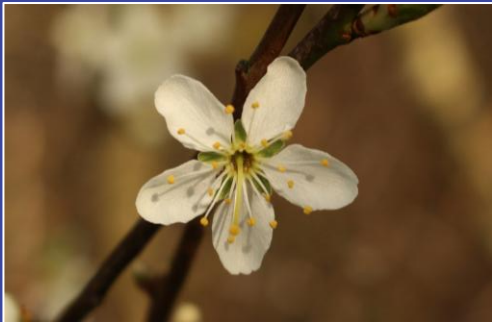
No microlites flying today, at this eye level:
Down to the gryke pavement, for duller ancient ferns
Still to be ticked off the list. No surprises here

Often we meet changing weather in the few hours
But we press on, with our clipboard and pencil,
Refreshing our knowledge of the summer pasture
Privileged to feel guardianship, albeit temporary
Of our precious Dales flora

- Helen Watkinson

Botanical Photography

We are lucky to be supported by a group talented photography volunteers, helping to enhance our communications and resources. This group is continuously building a bank of botanical images for use in training materials, newsletters, reports, our website and elsewhere. From high-definition anatomy, to broader scale landscape shots, quality images are a vital engagement tool and training aid.



Blackthorn, Ava Marley



Freshwater, Nathalie Esselin



Willowherb seeds, Sue McBean



Landscape, Suzanne Farmer



Rachel Murphy



Botany through art

Continued...

Kilnsey

We look for indicators of change, of constancy.
 We find the earth, the sky, a curlew call.
 The world turns, careless yet so fragile.

Each year we come to the same places – our garden
 for a time.

We count each flower – which has gone – oh Fairy
 Flax!

And which has thrived – Northern Bedstraw on a
 breezy crest.

The farmer, unseen, tends this land – the Rock Roses,
 wild Thyme, the Tormentil
 And what have we found in our counting?
 Precious friendship in a changing world

- Clare Ablett



▲ One of Clare and Helen's scenic plots in Yorkshire Dales NP

Inspired by our Wildflower Poetry Workshop at the
 start of the year, lead by Iris Hill; NPMS Photography
 volunteer Sue McBean shares this clever Haiku:

In the footsteps of John Clare...

Details are noticed.
Light, colour and focus fuse.
Creation flowers.



Botany book club

Don't you just love stumbling upon an exhibition or display
 unexpectedly, that turns out to be captivating and derails
 your plans for the next few hours?!

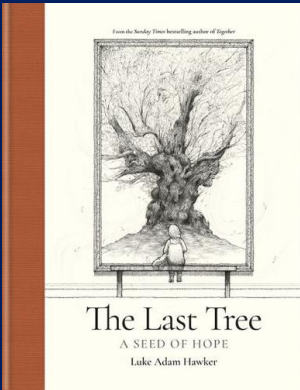
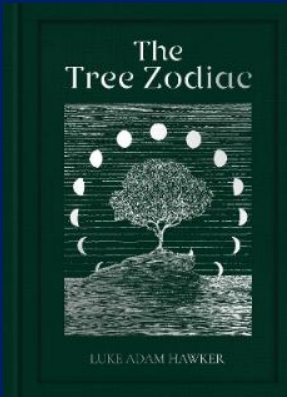
This happened to me this summer, as what intended to be a
 short walk at a local National Trust Estate before lunch,
 became a dive into an ancient Celtic zodiac - rooted in the
 thirteen lunar months, each of which associated with a
 different tree or plant.

I was pleased to come across "Drawn to Trees" – An outdoor
 exhibition of etchings by artist **Luke Adam Hawker**. The
 stunning etchings, an ancient process of building delicate
 marks on copper plates, explore personality traits drawn from
 the character and symbolism of each species. Whether or not
 you find yourself reflected in the traits of your tree sign (it
 turns out I was born under the Reed moon associated with
 analytical thinking and a focus on the truth), you cannot help
 but admire the detail and care taken with each work.

The exhibition description: *"The Tree Zodiac aims to spark
 curiosity, conversation and personal reflection. It reminds us
 that sometimes the wisdom we seek isn't written in the stars
 at all—but growing quietly all around us".*

The Tree Zodiac (Magic Cat Publishing) offers a glimpse of
 ancient beliefs, reimagining these tree signs for the modern
 reader, alongside these exquisite and emotive etches. From
 Ash to Alder, Hazel to Holly, you're invited to consider your
 Celtric tree sign and reflect on your own connection to the
 natural world.

Luke's second book, **The Last Tree: A Seed of Hope (Ilex
 press)**, is a touching tale that explores our relationship with
 the natural world, accompanied by beautiful illustrations and
 an important message suitable for all ages.



Field Diaries: Your pics



Enjoy a whistle stop tour of the UK with some of the images that have been shared with us during the 2026 season thus far. We love to receive your photos from out in the field, whether to help with a query, species/habitat ID, or simply to share your plot set up, a survey selfie or a fun find.



Tamsin Candeland:

2026 marks the 10th survey season with NPMS, for volunteer Tamsin. This Spring Tamsin shared this



lovely Spring Sedge *Carex caryophyllea* image from her damp grassland plot, within her 1 km square in Yorkshire. Reminding us of a much greener, damp luscious spring.



Wendy Rumsey: A trip to the beach. Wendy has shared the below images of Sea Rocket *Cakile maritima*, from her coastal plot in Kent. Not only beautiful, but they provide a good

example of getting up close to capture ID characteristics to aid both learning and verification



Andrew Chadwick: Surveyor Andrew currently monitors 3 NPMS squares. Here we see images from his Lincolnshire square. Including a beautiful example of a Common fumitory *Fumaria officinalis* (left), and Amphibious bistort *Persicaria amphibia* (right).



Indeed, the images below clearly show the drop in water level found at Andrew's freshwater plot, between his spring and late summer survey. Andrew notes that water was being pumped out to irrigate surrounding fields.



Freshwater pond plot: May



Freshwater pond plot: July

Field Diaries: Your pics

Continued (plot snaps)...



Rosie Briscoe: We love seeing plot set ups! Check out the amazing view from Rosie's bog plot in Perthshire, where she also enjoyed a sighting of Red deer during this visit.



Alisdair Dutton: During his second year surveying with NPMS, Alasdair shares this dreamy image of his woodland plot under mature pines in Perthshire.



Ceri Goring and Anne Griffith: Would you believe that these two images were taken on the same day in May, but at different survey plots in the Brecon Beacons? As well as great shots of surveys in action, Ceri and Anne remind us to be prepared for changes in conditions when out surveying!



Louise Hardy: Another great reminder of "safety first". Here we see Louise survey her inland rocks and scree plot in Northumberland.

Great care should be taken when traversing plots when the ground is sloped, uneven, and in this case unstable with loose fragments. Suitable footwear and a survey buddy are needed, as well as taking your time. If at any point you don't feel confident, please do not attempt to survey.

Field Diaries: Your pics

Continued...



Brooke Cameron: A member of the Northern Ireland Youth Network for Nature (see pg.13), Brooke joined a training day this season, with

Botanical Skills Officer Jo Mullholland, to learn all about NPMS surveys. She shared the below images of the day to her socials, demonstrating the winning combination of the NPMS species ID guide and hand lens for wildflower ID.



NPMS on the silver screen: *Countryfile* fans may have spotted a lovely mention of the NPMS on the show in May. There are 5 NPMS survey plots across Bemborough (Adam's) Farm, surveyed by long-term volunteer Chris

Millett, who we heard from at our anniversary celebration last Autumn (recording [here](#)). It was great to hear how, along with informing national trends, the scheme is also providing valuable information for local land managers, just like Adam and his team. Here, Chris' records of opposite-leaved golden saxifrage beside the River Windrush was a good indication of clean water and that field run off has been contained. Thanks to Alan Sumnall, Species Recovery Programme Manager at Plantlife, for waving the flag for the NPMS and highlighting the efforts of survey volunteers.



▲ Adam Henson filming on Chris' survey plot



Sarah Shuttleworth

▲ Opposite-leaved golden saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*





GET INVOLVED

Submit your data:

Please submit your 2026 season data by 31st October, for inclusion in the over winter analyses and 2026 Annual Report.

If you still have historical data, this can be entered any time to the NPMS database

Contact: support@npms.org.uk

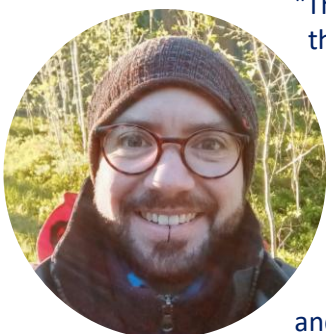


We also have a data entry training and support session scheduled in October. Register to come along [HERE](#).

Volunteer stories

We love contributions from volunteers towards our newsletters, web blog and Plot Portrait posters. If you'd like to pen a plot portrait, interest piece, or even provide a short video, please get in touch.

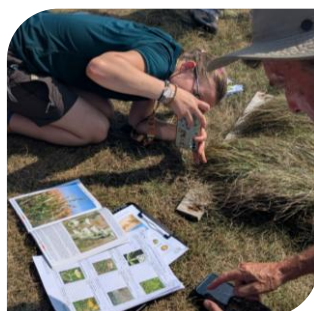
You can enjoy the most recent addition to our Plot Portrait Poster series [HERE](#), where we hear from new volunteer, Alexandre Gomes-Boga.



"This scheme has provided me with the rare opportunity to develop a truly reciprocal relationship with the land. I feel I'm doing something impactful for the future of these precious woodlands, and in return, they offer me unforgettable moments and help me a lot with my botany and surveying skills!" - **Alexandre**

NPMS Local support

- Are you a member of a local recording or interest group?
- Want to support more local meets in your area?
- Interested in hosting an online talk for a local group?



Please get in touch if your local group are interested in getting involved with the scheme. We'd love to help!

Learning Through Volunteering



12 – 22 October 2026

We are delighted to extend this offer of a varied and interesting range of free online sessions to National Plant Monitoring Scheme volunteers.

Developed by [Plantlife](#), in collaboration with:

- [The British Trust for Ornithology](#)
- [Butterfly Conservation](#)
- [Amphibian and Reptile Conservation](#)
- [The Mammal Society](#)

This programme offers opportunities from learning how to identify birds, butterflies and wildflowers, to discovering mammals and reptiles.



These events are exclusively for volunteers as a thank you for the time you dedicate to helping us protect nature. Programme linked above.



GET INVOLVED

Further opportunities...

... and projects that may be of interest to NPMS volunteers.

Learn more about our wonderful wildflowers

If you've already devoured all the NPMS online training resources and webinars, but you're still hungry for more, check out these options:



- Tips and resources for [getting started](#) with plant ID.
- Hundreds of botanical videos on the [BSBI YouTube channel](#): try the full-length [plant ID training webinars](#); the beginner-friendly videos under the banner of the [100 Plants Challenge](#); the selection of [short plant ID videos](#); and the series of [botanical skills webinars](#).
- The BSBI's in-house digital [plant identification guides](#) for different plant groups plus a round-up of some of the helpful [external resources](#) we've spotted.
- [Identiplant](#), the online ID course run by the BSBI – applications open on 1 December and you can [register your interest here](#).
- [Plants Are Green](#), our online, self-led course about how plants work – applications open on 1 October and you can [register your interest here](#).
- Botanical training courses offered in 2027 by [external providers](#) across Britain and Ireland.
- You can apply for a [BSBI grant](#) of up to £250 to help you take one of these training courses? Grant applications go live on 1 December so be ready to apply and don't forget to say on your application that you are a NPMS surveyor.

Meet up with fellow plant-hunters

All NPMS surveyors are invited to attend BSBI's autumn conferences. The [Scottish Botanists' Conference](#) takes place on Saturday, 7 November at RBG Edinburgh and the [British & Irish Botanical Conference](#) takes place at the Natural History Museum, London on Saturday 28 November. You'll be made very welcome and these events are a great way to pick up ID tips, hear fascinating talks about our wonderful wildflowers and meet fellow plant hunters. Just click on the links to find out what's on offer.



Rachel Murphy

Plant hunting... in the middle of winter?

Don't let your plant ID skills go rusty over winter - you'll need them to be pin-sharp when you head out to your NPMS square next spring! Why not "keep your eye in" by taking part in BSBI's New Year Plant Hunt to find out which of our wildflowers bloom in the middle of winter? You'll also be adding to the growing body of evidence around how our wild plants are responding to a changing climate. Last year, thousands of Plant Hunters spotted 663 different species flowering across Britain and Ireland. The Hunt will run from 31 December 2026 to 3 January 2027, and you can [register now](#) for spotter sheets, helpful hints and details of group hunts in your area.

[Find out more.](#)



Botanical University Challenge

This fun and friendly annual contest of botanical knowledge between teams of UK and Irish students reaches its grand final at the end of this month.

You can stream the nail-biting final live on the BUC [YouTube channel](#) on 19th August.

Held at the University of Reading, the competition will be followed by the Student Botany Festival, involving 2 days of networking, talks, career session and workshops. We look forward to representing NPMS at the event and engaging more student surveyors. Come and say hi if you are there!

Find out more about the BUC and conference on the [website](#), their Newsletter [The Thymes](#), Or follow [@botanicalunichallenge](#) on Instagram.



GET INVOLVED

Further opportunities...

... continued.

Plantlife

Fancy learning about Fungi?

Plantlife have a number of upcoming free events, both online and in-field, introducing the magical world of Fungi.



Upcoming training and events...

8th Sept 12:00 **Online Talk: How to Run Waxcap Watch Training – Lunch Session**

This workshop will equip group leaders with the confidence to teach others how to take part in Plantlife's Waxcap Watch in 2026.

[Link](#)

9th Sept 15:00 **Online Talk: How to Run Waxcap Watch Training – Afternoon Session**

This workshop will equip group leaders with the confidence to teach others how to take part in Plantlife's Waxcap Watch in 2026.

[Link](#)

15th Sept 19:00 **Online Event: What's Waxcap Watch and How to Take Part**

Join hundreds of volunteers making a difference for fungi by taking part in Plantlife's Waxcap Watch survey.

[Link](#)

31st Oct 10:00 **Fungi Walk at Three Hagges Woodmeadow**

Join nature reserves manager, Kara, and local fungi expert Rhona Sutherland, for a walk around Three Hagges Woodmeadow, discovering the fungi that grows on site.

[Link](#)



Free online Nature Courses:

Learn at your own pace. Whether a curious beginner, seasoned volunteer, student, land manager, or simply someone who loves the natural world, our free online courses are designed for you.

Explore the fascinating roles that plants and fungi play in our ecosystems and learn how you can help protect and restore the incredible biodiversity around us.



[Nature Courses](#)



Plantlife volunteering opportunities:

There are plenty of ways to volunteer with Plantlife. from supporting our teams remotely and flexibly from home, right through to field-based volunteering. Opportunities are updated regularly so it won't take long to find something to suit your interests and skills. Explore: [Volunteer - Plantlife](#)

Featured opportunities:

• Ranscombe Conservation Team:

Ranscombe Farm Nature Reserve is cared for with the help of a dedicated team of volunteers who support a wide range of practical conservation activities throughout the year. The team is looking for new members and all abilities are welcome.



• Woodmeadow Conservation Volunteer:

We are looking for volunteers to join our friendly group at Three Hagges Woodmeadow and get involved in caring for the reserve.



For more information on these opportunities get in touch volunteering@plantlife.org.uk



GET INVOLVED

Further opportunities...

... continued.

Still looking for more inspiration?

Why not take a look at the below free online guides and tutorials from **Plantlife**

There's something for everyone.

How to make a meadow guide:

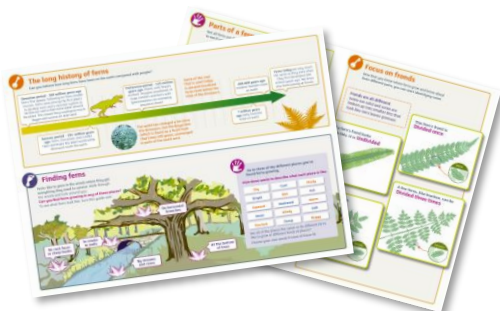
Even if you only have a small area, you can enjoy a space full of native wildflowers.



[Link](#)

Discover Forest Ferns guide:

Discover how to identify ferns and learn about their very, very long history. Great for all the family.



[Link](#)

Learn how to paint fungi – Tutorial:

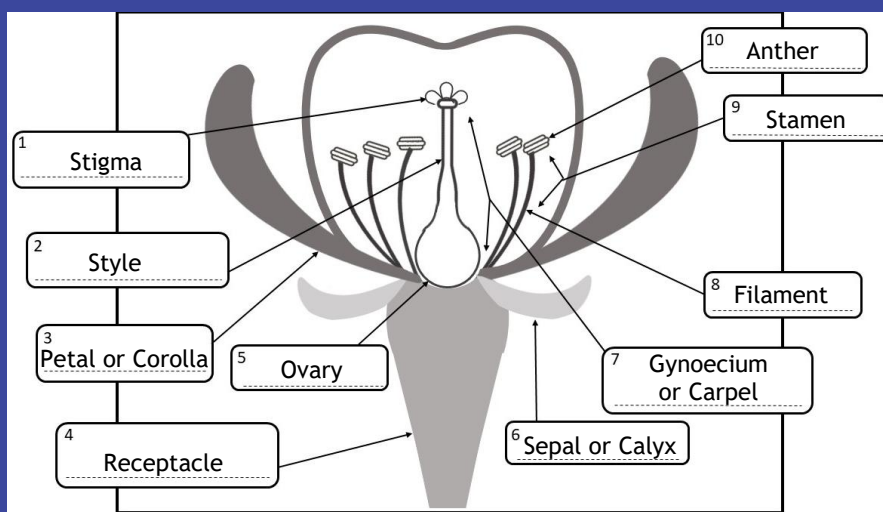
Learn how to paint a beautiful fly agaric fungus with watercolour. Perfect for beginners!

[Link](#)



Flower Anatomy: Back to Basics

Quiz time answers - Check the diagram below to see how you got on with our anatomy quiz on page 9.



THANK YOU!

A huge thank you to all volunteers that make the scheme possible. As ever, we are incredibly grateful for your enthusiasm and efforts. Also, thanks to the land holders and stakeholders who support and promote the NPMS.

Thanks to Andrew van Breda, Biren Rathod and Karolis Kazlauskis for technical support, along with our incredibly knowledgeable trainers.

Thank you to all the contributors to this newsletter.

We are here to help. Send us an email or give us a bell.

support@npms.org.uk

07399 299770 or 07711 922098



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