

Hay Time 2025 meadow surveys: Volunteer Update



SUMMARY



In June and early July 2025, 27 volunteers across the Yorkshire Dales and Forest of Bowland undertook botanical surveys of meadows as part of the Hay Time Project. Several training and refresher courses were offered to volunteers to learn and upskill in botanical identification skills in advance of the survey season. These were led by Laurie Wildwood of Wildwood Outdoor Education in late May and early June.

Volunteers surveyed 26 meadows, which had previously been restored between 2008 and 2024 as part of the Hay Time Project, using a variety of techniques including green hay, locally harvested seed (forage harvest, brush harvest, leaf vacuum) and plug planting.

The botanical monitoring surveys are essential to check on how the restored meadows are doing and guide us in our future work. The following update provides some of the key results from the 2025 monitoring.



KEY FUNCTIONAL SPECIES

Yellow rattle, red clover, sweet vernal grass and meadow buttercup are considered to be key functional species in meadow restoration. These species change the soil microbial conditions which alters the soil processes and creates niches for the later colonising species. 73% of the meadows monitored had all four of these functional species present - a great result!

Sweet vernal grass was present in every single meadow monitored, with red clover and meadow buttercup in 22 of the 26 meadows, and yellow rattle in 20 of the meadows.

SPECIES RICHNESS

The total number of species recorded per meadow gives a simple measure of 'species richness'. This does not take into account the type of species present, or their relative abundances within the meadow. However, in an analysis of the original Hay Time project data (2006-2011) this was found to be strongly linked to species diversity calculated using the Shannon Index (which takes into account the number and evenness of species) and therefore is a good overall measure of how a meadow is performing.

Species richness varied from 15 species per meadow, to an impressive 39 species. Overall, the average species richness was 27 species per meadow. The average number of species per quadrat i.e. per m² varied between 7 and 19 (average 12).

INDICATOR SPECIES

Great news – all meadows surveyed were found to support numerous meadow indicator species, the maximum being 11 different indicator species recorded in a single meadow. 17 of the 26 sites had five or more indicator species present.

The five most commonly occurring meadow indicator species were:

Illustrations by
Sarah
Ingwersen ©



Common sorrel
(22 meadows)



Yellow rattle
(20 meadows)



Eyebright sp.
(12 meadows)



Autumn hawkbit
(9 meadows)



Meadow vetchling
(8 meadows)

Some of the later flowering species such as wood crane's-bill and great burnet are still less frequent in our restored meadows (each found in only two of the monitored meadows), which provides supporting evidence for the focus on later flowering species in our current strategy.

For more information on indicator species see www.gov.uk/guidance/species-rich-grassland-indicator-species.

HOW IS THE DATA USED?

With landowners consent, we plan to use the data in the following ways:

- Provide targeted meadow management advice.
- Identify suitable potential donor sites for future restoration schemes.
- Identify previously restored meadows which have established and are ready for targeted indicator species reintroduction - see Case Study below.
- Submit records to the Local Environmental Data Centres - an impressive 706 individual species records were collected as part of the 2025 monitoring.
- Submit qualifying sites to Natural England for inclusion on the Priority Habitat Inventory.

Case Study - Muker

Three meadows in Muker were restored in 2008 as part of the Hay Time Project using leaf vacuum harvested seed collected from a nearby donor meadow. The meadows were subject to a full botanical survey in June 2025 by Janet Bethune, Sue Knight, Charlotte Roberts and Margaret Feetham. On the basis of these results, one of the meadows was selected for enhancement.

In October 2025, a plug planting event was organised by YDMT and 600 plugs were planted out in the meadow by eight volunteers from Sustainable Swaledale. Species included bird's-foot trefoil, great burnet, meadowsweet, devil's-bit scabious, lady's bedstraw and betony - species which were identified as absent during the summer 2025 survey.



THANK YOU!

A big thank you to all our Hay Time botanical volunteers – your time and effort is really appreciated and makes an important contribution to the project.

Sign up to our community conservation newsletter by scanning the QR code to keep up to date with the training courses available this year, and other opportunities to get involved.



THE FUTURE OF VOLUNTEERING AT YDMT

We are very proud of all our volunteers at YDMT and extremely grateful for all the hard work and support each of you provide to our small charity. We currently have 40 volunteers supporting a wide variety of our charitable aims and projects, including helping with meadow restoration, woodland management, surveying, bee identification, office support and assisting our Youth Forum to name a few.

We are currently reviewing our volunteer processes. We are keen to ensure we have the best structure, training and support in place and that we provide you all with more information about the wonderful impact you help us to have.

To help us achieve this we are seeking funding from North Yorkshire Council for an 18 month Volunteer Coordinator role - this would be a shared resource in partnership with the Yorkshire Dales National Park, SELFA and Skipton Step Into Action and would provide us with resource and capacity. This partnership will also be looking at developing a 'Volunteer Passport', enabling volunteers the opportunity to gain skills and experience within all the partner organisations.

More details about this work to follow soon. In the meantime, if you have any suggestion about how we can improve our volunteering offer please feel free to contact keira.burns@ydmtd.org

