



## Recording Card - How healthy is your meadow?

What to look out for...	Score	My Score
<b>1. Nettle patches</b>	None	4
	Very few	3
	Thin patches throughout the meadow	2
	Lots of big nettle clumps	0
<b>2. Signs of livestock</b>	Sign saying be careful/keep dogs on lead as there are sometimes grazing animals (livestock) in the field	1
	Animal/livestock proof fencing (this is often wire mesh at the base of fences to stop sheep escaping or it could be a hedge that has no/few gaps at the bottom)	1
	Sheep wool attached to hedgerow or fencing	1
	Cow pats or sheep poo	1
<b>3. Leaf type</b>	1-3 different shapes of leaves	0
	4-6 different shapes of leaves	2
	7-10 different shapes of leaves	3
	11+ different shapes of leaves	5
<b>4 and 5. Grasses</b>	Yorkshire fog	1
	Sweet vernal grass	2
	Rye-grass	Minus 5
<b>6. Yellow rattle presence</b>	None	0
	A few	2
	Well distributed throughout the meadow	4
<b>7. Wild flowers - How many of the meadow flowers did you spot?</b>	Bird's-foot trefoil	1
	Meadow buttercup	1
	Meadow vetchling	2
	Ox-eye daisy	2
	Tufted vetch	2
	An orchid	3
	Field scabious	2
	Common knapweed	2
	Red clover	1
	Self-heal	1
<b>Total score for your meadow</b> (check overleaf to see what your score means)		

Now mark your score on our virtual meadow and see how your meadow compares to others in the UK. Visit [www.wildaboutplants.org.uk/magnificentmeadows](http://www.wildaboutplants.org.uk/magnificentmeadows)

Save our Magnificent Meadows is the UK's largest partnership project transforming the fortunes of vanishing wild flower meadows, grasslands and wildlife. Led by Plantlife, the partnership is made up of 11 organisations and is primarily funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

[www.magnificentmeadows.org.uk](http://www.magnificentmeadows.org.uk) [www.wildaboutplants.org.uk](http://www.wildaboutplants.org.uk)



## ACTIVITY SHEET

# How healthy is your meadow?

In these field-based investigations we are going to look in detail at a meadow and decide how healthy it is and how good it is at **supporting wildlife**.

Plants are good indicators of how **healthy** a meadow is and we will be exploring this to allow you to decide whether your meadow is **poor, good** or **very good**. It is best to do this investigation between May and September.



Refer to the **Identification Sheet** for each activity and **record your findings** on the back page of this activity sheet.

### ACTIVITY 1.

#### How many patches of nettles or thistles can you find?

Stand in your meadow and look around for patches of nettles. Decide how many patches you can see and select the category which best suits your meadow.



**Why is this important?** Nettles and thistles are a sign that the ground is rich in nutrients like nitrogen and phosphate. Where the ground is rich in nutrients many meadow species are out-competed by stronger species such as nettles. Fewer nutrients are better for meadow plants.

### ACTIVITY 2.

#### Are there any signs that animals such as cattle (cows) and sheep graze the meadows?

Look around your meadow and record whether you can see evidence of livestock and make a note of which on the back page.

-  Sign saying be careful/keep dogs on lead as there are sometimes grazing animals (livestock) in the field
-  Animal/livestock proof fencing (this is often wire mesh at the base of fences to stop sheep escaping or it could be a hedge that has no/few gaps at the bottom)
-  Signs of sheep wool attached to hedgerow or fencing
-  Cow pats or sheep poo



Highland Cow

(c) www.aaronmoffat.co.uk



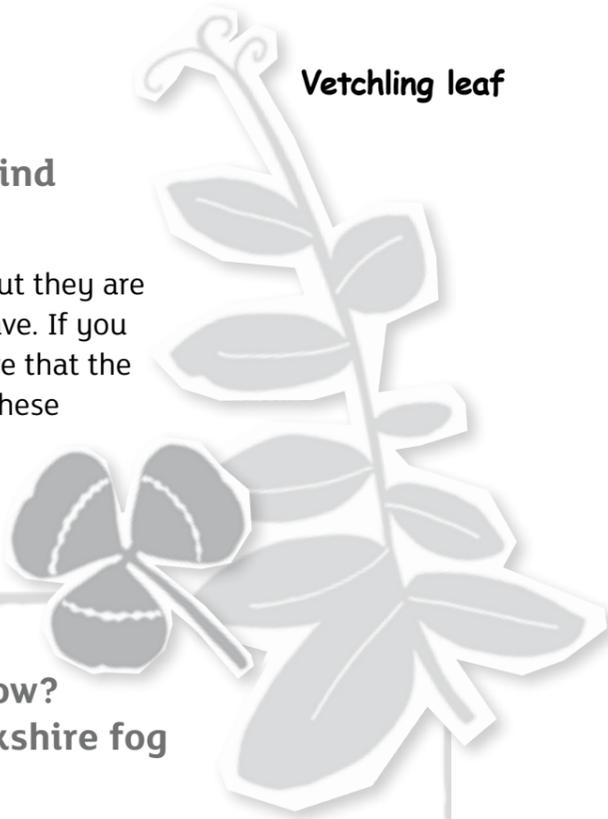
**Why is this important?** Allowing livestock to graze in a traditional manner allows wild plants to flower and makes our grasslands special. Livestock is usually allowed once the wild flowers have set their seed - (made seed and the seed has fallen to the ground). This happens in late summer. The animals are let into the field to eat the grass. This stops the grass from becoming too strong and taking over the meadow crowding out the wild flowers.



### ACTIVITY 3.

How many different types of leaf can you find along a three metre strip?

Meadows may not always have very rare plants in them but they are important because of the variety of plant life that they have. If you found lots of different types of leaf shapes you can be sure that the area has a high biodiversity (variety of species) and that these species are not being out-competed by more robust and vigorous nettles, thistles and grasses.



Vetchling leaf

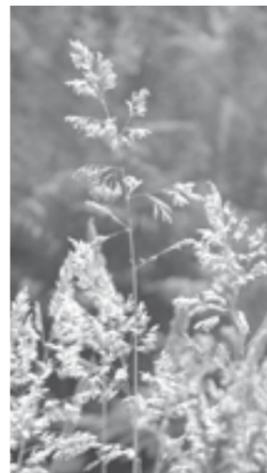
Clover leaf



### ACTIVITY 4.

Which grasses are in your meadow? Hunt for sweet vernal grass, yorkshire fog and rye-grass.

Grasses provide the basic structure of a meadow. The grasses are also food plants for many meadow butterflies. Some butterflies, such as the marbled white, need many native grasses growing in the same area because the caterpillars like different grass species at different stages in their life. Meadow browns and skipper butterflies depend on different grasses too.

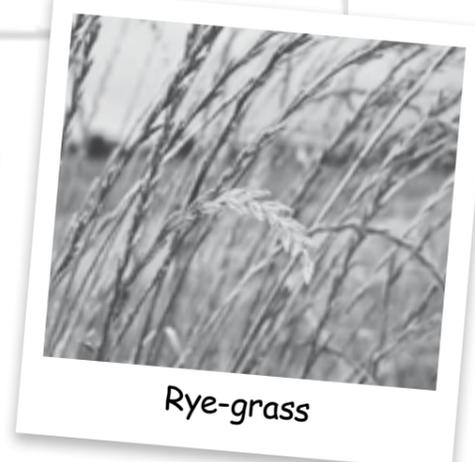


Yorkshire fog

Meadow brown



**Did you know?** Some grasses such as yorkshire fog and sweet vernal grass are associated with grassland and meadows that have been managed traditionally. Sweet vernal grass gives hay its distinctive "sweet" smell.



Rye-grass

### ACTIVITY 5.

Can you find rye-grass?

The presence of rye-grass can indicate that your meadow has been improved – ploughed and sown with rye-grass and often clover to provide good fodder or feed for a meadow.

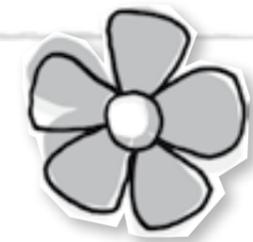
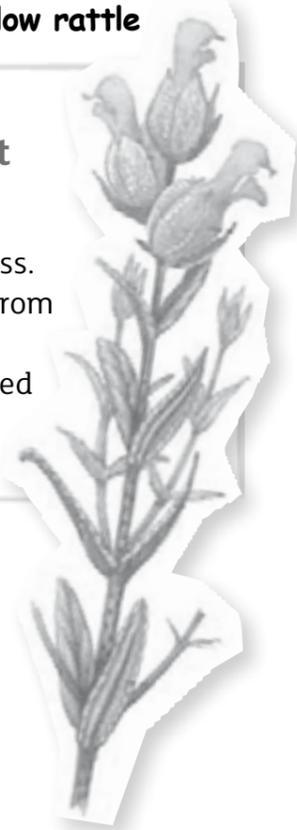
When this happens fertilizer is often regularly spread on the meadow too. This means there are more nutrients in the soil in the meadow. This favours grasses and tends to mean wild flowers are pushed out of the meadow.

### ACTIVITY 6.

Can you find yellow rattle in your meadow? It is best to look for this plant between May and July.

Yellow rattle is an important plant for meadows. It is parasitic on grass. This means that it attaches itself to grass roots and takes nutrients from the grass. This weakens the grass causing it to grow less vigorously. As a result other meadow plants can thrive. They are not out-competed by grass.

Yellow rattle



### ACTIVITY 7.

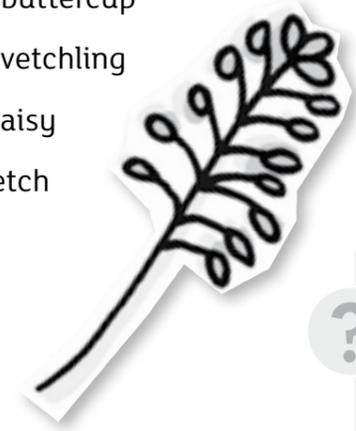
Can you find these meadow flowers?

**White and yellow:**

- Bird's-foot trefoil
- Meadow buttercup
- Meadow vetchling
- Ox-eye daisy
- Tufted vetch

**Red and pink:**

- An orchid
- Field scabious
- Common knapweed
- Red clover
- Self-heal



**Did you know?** Different bees collect nectar and pollen from different flowers? The greater the variety of flowers in an area the better it is for bees. Flowers which are members of the pea family, such as tufted vetch and red clover, produce pollen that is rich in protein and is very important for bee nutrition.

### Check your score

How healthy is your meadow? Count your score overleaf and check what your results mean here:

-  **Very good** – A score of **20 or more** may mean your meadow is in good condition
-  **Good** – A score of **between 10-20** means your meadow is in reasonable condition but may benefit from conservation management
-  **Poor** – A score of **between minus 3-10** may mean your meadow is not in a healthy condition and has probably been improved at some time in the past (for example, fertilizer has been used in the meadow or it has been ploughed up)

