



Rod Wood

Wildlife Sites Coordinator DAVID CADMAN explores the crowning glory of some of the county's finest flower-rich meadows at the Rod Wood reserve, near Cheddleton

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust's Rod Wood nature reserve supports a mosaic of important habitat types, including woodland, scrub and unimproved grassland. Some of the grassland at the site is managed as traditional hay meadow, with a cut taking place around mid-late July.

In 2013, the site was designated as Staffordshire's Coronation Meadow. The Coronation Meadows initiative was launched by the Prince of Wales to commemorate the Queen's 60th anniversary. The project aimed to identify one species-rich meadow in each county from which green hay could be harvested to create further plant-rich grasslands. The hay meadows at Rod Wood have been used as 'donors' for a variety of grassland restoration projects in Staffordshire. For more information see Victoria Brooks' article on meadow restoration on p14.

The meadows at Rod Wood should be looking at their best from mid summer, depending on the weather.

1 Daisy, daisy
At the first stop a range of plant species associated with traditionally-managed hay meadows can be seen including ox-eye daisy, which is usually one of the first of the taller species to flower, and common knapweed, one of the mainstays of neutral, species-rich hay meadows.

2 Orchids and eyebright
The site is host to a number of plants which favour low nutrients and are restricted to unimproved grassland. At Stop 2 common-spotted orchids are plentiful. Also in this area are eyebrights, small, annual plants which like yellow-rattle are semi-parasitic.

3 Devil's bit
At this point, on the north-facing slope the grassland sward contains lots of devil's-bit scabious, which flowers in late summer, and a lawn of sedges, distinctive for their blue-green leaves.

4 Wild and wet
This area of the site has impeded drainage and contains a variety

of plant species of wetter communities. Plants to be found here include soft rush, ragged robin and lesser spearwort, a member of the buttercup family.

5 Botanical diversity
This is one of the most botanically-diverse areas of the meadows, in addition to giving the opportunity for some fantastic views looking north towards Leek. A thorough search reveals the small, scarce adder's-tongue fern, which is only present in grasslands that have not been agriculturally-improved or ploughed.



Six to spot



Adder's-tongue fern

Centuries ago, this small, mysterious plant was believed to be a cure for snake-bite. It can easily be mistaken for the leaves of common sorrel, but has a tongue-like spike that carries the spore-cases of the fern.



Ox-eye daisy

A typical grassland plant, the ox-eye daisy thrives on roadside verges and waste ground, as well as in traditional hay meadows and along field edges looked after for wildflowers. Its blooms appear from July to September.



Common knapweed

This very common perennial of a variety of grassland has pinkish-purple flower heads from June to September that attract a myriad of insects, including butterflies such as common blues, marbled whites and meadow browns.



Common-spotted orchid

The common-spotted orchid is the most common UK orchid. It grows in many different habitats including woodland, roadside verges, hedgerows, old quarries, sand dunes and marshes. It is in bloom between June and August.



Yellow-rattle

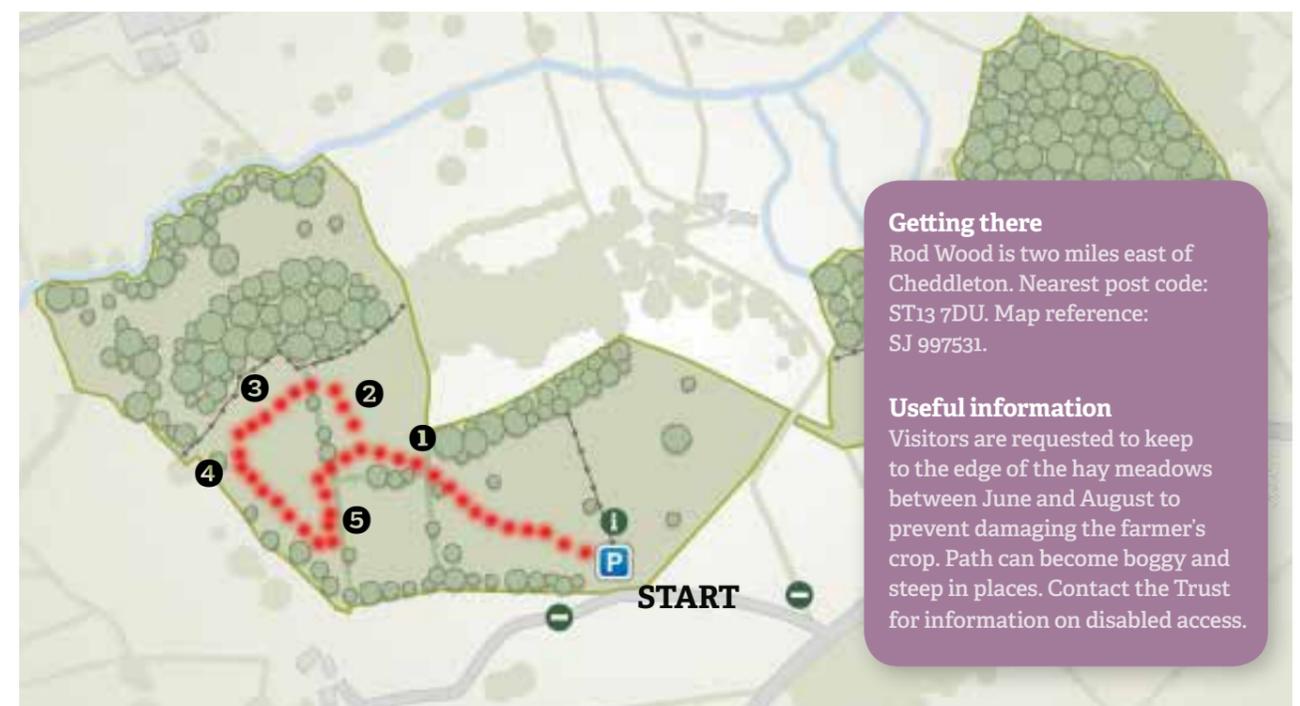
The brown, purse-like calyxes (covering the sepals) of yellow-rattle give this plant its common name – brush through a wildflower meadow at the height of summer and you'll hear the tiny seeds rattling in their pods.



Devil's-bit scabious

Devil's-bit scabious has flattened, rounded flower heads which range in colour from blue to pinky-purple. Its leaves are long and oval, and differ from those of field scabious, which are dark green, hairy and deeply lobed.

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Getting there

Rod Wood is two miles east of Cheddleton. Nearest post code: ST13 7DU. Map reference: SJ 997531.

Useful information

Visitors are requested to keep to the edge of the hay meadows between June and August to prevent damaging the farmer's crop. Path can become boggy and steep in places. Contact the Trust for information on disabled access.